J. A. SPENDER



Yours very sincerely,

Vandyk

J. A. SPENDER

by

WILSON HARRIS

With 4 half-tone illustrations



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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	FOREWORD	vii
I	FOUNDATIONS	1
II	FIRST EDITORSHIP	10
III	THE *WESTMINSTER*	21
IV	A JOURNALIST'S STANDARDS	42
V	THE MAN	52
VI	RELIGION AND LIFE	66
VII	POLITICS AND PERSONS	73
VIII	REASONINGS WITH ROSEBERY	98
IX	ESHER AND FISHER	116
X	ASPECTS OF NORTHCLIFFE	136
XI	FOREIGN AFFAIRS	144
XII	AUTHORSHIP	171
XIII	COMMISSIONS AND MISSION	187
XIV	IN JOURNEYINGS OFTEN	201
XV	LIBERAL TWILIGHT	213
XVI	THE LAST CHAPTER	219
	APPENDIX	230
	INDEX	237

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

J. A. SPENDER	*Frontispiece*
	Facing page
UNDERGRADUATE	40
JERUSALEM, 1931	120
BROADCASTING, 1940	200

FOREWORD

I HAVE written this Life of J. A. Spender at Mrs. Spender's request. There were at least two good reasons why I should not write it, and I can hardly hope that the one reason why I should outweighs them. In the first place, there were other friends of Spender's who, if they had been able to undertake the work, would quite certainly have done it better; in the second no book such as Spender's memory deserves can be written as this one perforce has been—in the only time, bits of evenings and week-ends, that the production of a weekly review under war conditions leaves available. On the other hand I can claim at least the qualification of frequent contact with Spender over some thirty years, of a substantial identity of outlook with his on both domestic and foreign politics and of an intense admiration for him both as a man and as a journalist. I did not learn my journalism from him—for that I am under an eternal debt to his friend A. G. Gardiner, Editor of the *Daily News*—but I always looked on him as the very mould and pattern of the highest type of journalist, alike in competence and in character, a man to whom, for the example he set and the standards he maintained, the whole profession owed incalculably much. Following him *longo intervallo* in that profession I took at the beginning a course curiously like his. Like him I just missed my First (at the other university); like him I ate dinners at the Inner Temple, but was never called; like him I lived for a time at Toynbee Hall; like him I first turned my thoughts to teaching for a livelihood; like him I found myself in journalism unexpectedly and without design. There the parallel ends, for Spender, as was inevitably ordained, moved steadily on—not indeed effortlessly, but by a commanding combination of ability and hard work—to a position which made him for a dozen years in the first two decades of this century unquestionably the most influential journalist in the country.

Such as this memoir is, it owes more than I can indicate to friends of Spender's who have put their counsel, or his letters to them, or both, at my disposal. To make all the acknowledgements that are called for is impossible; to make selective acknowledgement may seem invidious. Yet there are some expressions of thanks which cannot be omitted—first and foremost of course to Mrs. Spender,

who began by placing me in possession of a mass of papers so admirably classified and docketed as to simplify enormously the task of scrutiny and assimilation, and has since then been invariably ready to answer the countless questions I have rained in on her on points of detail. As to the letters to Spender quoted in this volume, I am indebted for permission to use them either to the writers, if still alive, or to their literary executors. In the former category I may mention with special gratitude the Prime Ministers of Great Britain and of Canada, and in the latter the Earl of Rosebery, Lord Fisher and Lord Esher in relation to letters from their respective fathers. Sir Alfred Watson, for twenty years one of Spender's principal colleagues on the *Westminster Gazette* has helped me both positively with valuable information and negatively by saving me from more than one reprehensible error.

Spender himself wrote one book, *Life, Journalism and Politics*, which is almost wholly autobiographical. On that I have naturally and necessarily drawn largely, but being published in 1927 it says nothing of the last fifteen years of his life, and, being written by Spender himself it gives no picture of Spender as the world saw and estimated him. He characteristically omitted from his book most or all of the tributes to his work which I have been free to publish here. It is perhaps on its rectification of such omissions that this volume can best base its claim to the indulgence of whatever readers it may attract.

Abinger Common. WILSON HARRIS.
February, 1945.

Chapter I

FOUNDATIONS

Few careers lend themselves better to epitome than Alfred Spender's. He was born (on December 23rd 1862) and brought up at Bath, went on to Balliol, where he spent the four years 1881–85, edited the *Eastern Morning News* at Hull from 1886 to 1891, became Assistant-Editor of the *Westminster Gazette* in 1893 and Editor from 1896 to 1922, after which he devoted his remaining years, till his death in 1942, to writing a series of notable books, beginning with the *Life of Campbell-Bannerman* in 1923 and ending with the posthumously published *Last Essays* in 1944.

Spender was the son of literary parents. It is true that his father and both his grandfathers were doctors, but like Henry Vaughan and John Locke and many more Dr. Spender had interests which ranged far beyond the bounds of his profession. "The whole bent of his mind," Spender wrote "was literary and theological"* and though his only important work was devoted to a study of "the pigmentations of rheumatism," a subject in which, as physician to the Mineral Water Hospital at Bath, he specialised, it is clear that he made his home a place where books were cared for and literary achievement stood high in the scale of values. He was a cousin of Crabb Robinson the diarist, and his father, Alfred's grandfather, had been a close friend of Walter Savage Landor. Alfred's mother, who wrote as Lily Spender, was a novelist of considerable repute in her day, and Alfred mentions with just pride that the *Spectator*, in a two-column review of her *Parted Lives* in 1883, declared the book to be the best novel of the year with the single exception of *Middlemarch*. Mrs. Spender's success with her pen was, indeed, remarkable. She began writing, first essays and then three-volume novels, early in her married life, for the express purpose of paying for the education of her large family, and she not only accomplished that (publishing twenty-one novels between 1869 and 1895) but built up as well a fund for holidays, and another to enable her husband to retire while he still had some life to live. (Those were days, it may

*He himself, in a brief epitome of his life, wrote: "I took the deepest interest in the affairs of the Church of England, of which I was always a loyal member."

be observed, when the State took from authors in income-tax, not 10/- but 2d., for every pound of their earnings). Journalism, moreover, was in the family, for one of Spender's uncles, William Saunders (of whom more later), had started the *Western Morning News* at Plymouth, in conjunction with another uncle, Edward Spender, in 1860, and the *Eastern Morning News* at Hull in 1864.

John Alfred Spender (he was known all his life by his second Christian name in the family, but never used anything but the initials J. A. in his journalistic and literary work) was born on December 23rd 1862, the third child and eldest son in a family of eight, at 37 Gay Street, Bath. Two of his brothers, Harold and Hugh, made themselves some name in London journalism, though neither could compare in ability with Alfred. Bath is surrounded with country of rich beauty, and the boys of the Spender family roamed freely over it. On his fourteenth birthday Alfred acquired a penny-farthing bicycle with a fifty-inch wheel, "which" he says, "gave me a range of fifty miles, which on occasion could be extended to eighty or ninety, and took me to the sea on one side and over the Wiltshire downs as far as Oxford on the other". On a modern safety bicycle eighty or ninety miles in the day is no mean performance, and anyone who has ever seen a machine of the seventies will realize that a day's adventure on it was likely to mean blood and sweat—both of which Alfred shed abundantly—and in a less robust character than his, tears as well. But such hazards meant little to a boy who (having dared another and found the challenge taken up) had walked round the cornice of a church-tower forty feet above the street, the clock-chimes suddenly setting the tower rocking the while.

What Spender's views on the respective merits of day-schools and boarding-schools were I never heard him say, but he himself experienced day-schools only. Of his preparatory school he says little, except that, "having flaming red hair and a deeply freckled face," he found himself called on to resist even unto blood attempts to fix on him the appellations "carrots" or "freckles". His school reports, some of which have been preserved, tell a little more of the story. At what age he first came under the aegis of

Bath Classical and Mathematical Preparatory School

FOR THE SONS OF GENTLEMEN EXCLUSIVELY

20 PORTLAND PLACE

the family annals do not reveal, but the first report among the batch before me is for the half-year ending December 1870, the month in which the young Alfred attained his eighth birthday. His studies at that relatively tender age included Divinity, Classics (in which he showed particular promise), Mathematics, English, French, History, Geography, Elocution and Writing. Those on the alert for early foreshadowings of future achievement might find considerable material for edification in these documents. Here it must be sufficient to quote only one mild stricture under the head of "Conduct": "Improved and generally satisfactory. He must try to be more continuously diligent and less interested in his neighbours' affairs". How narrow is the frontier between vice and virtue! In the last few words is indicated unmistakably the precocious exercise of qualities fundamental to the make-up of the successful journalist, whose chief concern is with other people's business.

Spender, indeed, as it happens, himself made much the same comment as this on the next stage of his education, at Bath College. Admitting that the training there was in some respects unorthodox, he gives it unqualified praise, declaring that "it kindled interests in all directions, led to omnivorous desultory reading, left me free to think my own thoughts, and prepared me for the universal busybodiness which is the most serviceable equipment of the journalist".

This was Bath College under T. W. Dunn, evidently a remarkable headmaster, for, though he would seem to owe his repute mainly to Spender's appreciation of him, the justice of that need not be questioned. Dunn was a Fellow of Peterhouse, and had been an assistant-master at Clifton for ten years. Dr. F. S. Boas, the distinguished Shakespearean scholar, one of Spender's Balliol contemporaries, who went to Clifton in 1877, remembers Dunn simply as "an original and picturesque personality"; but originality in a headmaster can be inspiring to a responsive boy of the right age. As Dr. Boas puts it: "He was a man of original ideas and methods on unconventional lines, well suited to stimulate the intellectual powers of pupils of exceptional ability like Alfred Spender." Spender was fifteen when Dunn came to Bath from Clifton, and on his advent in 1878 Bath College was founded, in succession to the old Sydney College. So at least Spender, who delivered the address on the occasion of the unveiling of a memorial tablet to Dunn in Bath Abbey in 1934, implied on that occasion, and had stated definitely in his *Life, Journalism and Politics;* but records still extant show Bath College to have been in existence in 1872, with first

a W. R. Smith and later a Stirling C. Voules as Principal. The discrepancy is of small consequence, for it is clearly Bath College under Dunn, from 1878, when he assumed the headmastership, to 1881, when Spender's school life ended, that made the impression to which the memorial address so strikingly testifies. Of the comments of Mr. Stirling C. Voules on his pupil "Spender i" only one need be perpetuated. It comes under the joint heading, English, History and Geography, and reads: "Fair. I want to see him develop, as he grows older, powers of thought". Mr. Voules, it is to be hoped, lived long enough to see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

There is no mistaking the effect Dunn had on Spender, or the part his influence unquestionably played in the development of some of the qualities most conspicuous in Spender's character. "At all hours of the day and night, and whatever the subject-matter," said Spender in Bath Abbey, "he was teaching his pupils the art of living, teaching them integrity, loyalty, disinterestedness". Over whatever lands, in whatever vocations, those pupils may have been scattered, few of them, perhaps none, can have better demonstrated in his own career how faithfully the lesson had been learnt than the author of the tribute himself. If Spender, at a time when he had been the intimate associate of Prime Ministers and leaders in every department of national life, could write of Dunn, "he was in some ways the most remarkable man I have ever known", it is clear that even among great headmasters Dunn must have been exceptional. He was so much the school that when he retired it decayed rapidly, and has long ceased to exist.

Spender was head of the school for three years, concentrating mainly on classics (a neat set of iambics, marked in pencil "a prize, T.W.D." survives from this date), with the result that at the end of 1881 he won a classical exhibition at Balliol, going into residence early in the following year. Balliol was a great society in the early eighties. Jowett had been Master since 1870, and his devastating comments and not less devastating silences were already legendary. Spender had early experience of them himself.

> "The Master," he wrote in a letter home at the beginning of his first term, "invited me to dessert on Friday—and the interview with him was, as I had been led to expect, most formidable. The Master sat at the top of the table and appeared to go to sleep, but eyed one keenly all the time. There was one other man there besides myself,—an Armenian (for at Balliol we have all nations and languages), who at first waxed talkative in broken English.

The Master's answers were monosyllabic, 'really', 'indeed', etc., and the Armenian was frozen into silence. My reception was not much warmer. I told him, at his own request, that there were four debating societies in Balliol. That, he said, was entirely absurd. He asked me what was the next Bill to come on in Parliament; I said I thought the 'County franchise.' That he also said was absurd (however, I shall probably prove right, unless obstruction prevents). After that both the Armenian and I subsided, and after talking to one another a little across the table pulled out our watches simultaneously, and the Master said we might go. He invites a man on purpose to stare at him, and to inspire him with awe, and is invariably silent himself, and contradictory. He makes good use of these occasions, for he seems to know all about everybody in College."

Such was the Master. At the High Table were two future Masters, Strachan-Davidson and A. L. Smith. T. H. Green, too, was of the company, and with R. L. Nettleship, Arnold Toynbee and others constituted a wealth of scholarship and distinction such as few colleges, if any, at either university, could parallel.

The undergraduates, moreover, were as notable a set as the dons. Asquith had gone down in 1874, but with his Fellowship, and the success he was already achieving at the Bar, he was still a well-remembered figure. Milner, who came a few years later, was during Spender's time at Balliol making a name in journalism on the *Pall Mall* under Morley. They and others like them had set the Balliol standard, and the men of Spender's year or the years immediately before and after were fully competent to maintain it. Chief among them were George Curzon (whom Spender credits in his Union days with the same ample and flawless eloquence as so often in the earlier decades of this century resounded in the legislative Chambers at Westminster or Delhi), Cosmo Lang and Edward Grey*—who, being sent down for idleness in 1884, took no degree

*Spender came in contact with Grey at Balliol, but never knew him there. The nature of the contact was unusual. Spender for a time shared rooms behind the same oak with Lord Weymouth, now the Marquess of Bath (to whom he refers warmly in a letter home), and on one occasion the two were assailed in their habitation by a posse of undergraduates with some private score (not, I think, against Spender) to settle. The oak resisted long, but red-hot pokers were finally conclusive, and the besiegers triumphed. Forty years later Spender happened to relate the story to Grey, who observed: "Of course; I led the raiders." Darkness presumably prevented recognition at the time, for Spender expressly mentions his admiration for Grey's handsome features and athletic figure, though so far as college days were concerned it was a case of *vidit tantum*.

till as Foreign Secretary he was given an honorary D.C.L. in 1907—Anthony Hope Hawkins, Godfrey Benson (the late Lord Charnwood), H. L. W. Lawson (the late Lord Burnham), C. E. Mallet (now Sir Charles, Financial Secretary to the War Office 1910–11), the late Lord Sumner, and many others whose names must be left unmentioned lest enumeration become wearisome.

Into this brilliant society—so brilliant and so varied that the very richness of Balliol's own resources almost subordinated the university to the college for Balliol men—Alfred Spender was introduced as an exhibitioner at the beginning of 1882. Sir Charles Mallet writes of his advent: "He came up from Bath College with a high reputation, and soon became known as a very pleasant companion, interested in almost everything, in work, in games, in music, sketching, politics, rather more mature in mind perhaps than his contemporaries, but with a double portion of a young man's charm. He had generally a fiddle and a paint-box at hand." He brought to Oxford a mind already well-stored and always receptive. His classical grounding had been thorough and his English reading wide and discriminating. He had grown up, as he says, in days when Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold, Swinburne and William Morris, among great poets, and Carlyle, Ruskin, George Eliot, Froude and Goldwin Smith, among great prose-writers, were alive and adding to their output year by year. Some of them it was Spender's fortune to meet at Oxford; he studied art with Ruskin as a diligent and devoted pupil; and at one evening party which he attended at the Master's he found that the guests included Browning, Matthew Arnold, Ruskin, Huxley, H. A. J. Munro (of "Lucretius" fame), and R. C. Jebb. Browning the next morning encountered the bright-haired undergraduate in the quad, and walked up and down with him for perhaps half an hour, engaging him in what must have been a memorable, as it was indeed a long-remembered, conversation. A poet's talk was calculated to be specially congenial to Spender, for he held decided views about poetry. To the end of his life he maintained with vigour and conviction that if the verse of twentieth-century Bloomsbury was poetry, then what Keats and Tennyson and Browning wrote demonstrably was not—and vice versa.

No man to whom his schools are his one concern has got the best out of Oxford or Cambridge. Spender was indeed mortified temporarily that his First in Mods. was followed only by a Second in

Greats; he was obviously a First Class man.* But, apart from the fact that he was far from well during the examination, the multiplicity of his interests was sufficient explanation and excuse; Joseph Chamberlain, whom he met just after going down, consoled him by mentioning that his son Austen had just fared similarly at Cambridge; and Spender himself reflected in after years that by closing to him the academic career which he might otherwise have taken up the examiners had diverted the current of his life into channels in which he was well content for it to flow. There was one other contributory explanation of the Second. The classics can be studied from the point of view predominantly of form or of content. At Oxford in the eighties form was favoured, a choice to which Spender could ill adjust himself. His concern was with the content, with the classics as literature, not as examples of style and usage. His admiration for Browning would hardly extend to his Grammarian.

From Oxford generally Spender gained immeasurably much. His interests were wide. He played Rugby for his college and the violin for his own satisfaction, he painted, he swam, he spoke at the Union, attaining minor office as Junior Librarian, he was an active member of several college and university societies. As he has commemorated some of his Oxford contemporaries in his various books so some of them who still survive have set down their recollections of him. I am indebted particularly to Lord Lang of Lambeth and Sir Charles Mallet for information, hardly now obtainable elsewhere, on which the remainder of this chapter is mainly based. A passage of Spender's own lends special fitness to one of the testimonies I have mentioned.

"Though few of us came into what is called public life," he wrote in 1927, "we were all up to the neck in politics and nearly

*Fifty-five years later Spender wrote to his friend Herbert Worsley: "I have never quite got over the fact that though I got a very good first in what used to be called 'pure scholarship', I failed in the 'higher scholarship' which won the great prizes, Ireland, Craven, etc. That was a great disappointment to my tutors and schoolmasters and it was well rubbed into me. You can hardly realize what is suffered by a prize boy (I was best of my year in the Public Schools Exam. in 1881) when he doesn't come up to expectations afterwards. Then I had an attack of pleurisy in my final examinations which pushed me down to a second in 'Greats', and I departed from Balliol in deep disfavour, and was judged to have failed the College. Had I fulfilled my promise, I should probably have spent a lifetime at Oxford, as fellow, tutor and possible professor. Perhaps it was a blessing in disguise that I didn't, but one doesn't like failure in any line—vanity, no doubt, but there it is."

all ardent Radicals. Cosmo Lang, now Archbishop of York, led the Conservative party in College, which put him, so to speak, on the opposite side of the street to us, but he came in and out of our group, ragging us as we ragged him, a delightful and copious talker, full of zeal and fervour, with whom we had endless arguments. Of all the speakers I can remember he was the readiest and most eloquent. But none of us dreamt of him in those days as Archbishop of York; we thought of him working through the bar to politics, and conquering the summits of the secular world."

But Cosmo Lang did become Archbishop of York, and then Archbishop of Canterbury, and it was after retiring from that high office that, in a longer retrospect than Spender's by eighteen years, he painted a companion portrait.

"Alfred Spender was a year senior to me," he writes for the purposes of this memoir, "but I knew him well, and our intercourse was constant. His closest friends, I think, were Anthony Hawkins, afterwards better known as Anthony Hope, and Charles Mallet. They formed a group of ardent Liberals. I was at the time a somewhat militant young Conservative, but my sympathies were really Liberal, and political differences did not affect our friendship. We were very friendly antagonists, both in the College debating societies and at the Union, where he often spoke."

Lord Lang adds that Spender's contemporaries often wondered what career he would decide on, but that before he went down it seemed certain to be journalism, for he had even then a strong conviction of the importance and responsibility of the Press. Spender himself seems to have been by no means so sure about his future, and the Master, so far from encouraging him in the course he subsequently took, declared summarily, "Journalism is not a profession, not a profession, Mr. Spender".* Jowett's idea for all his men except the obviously unqualified was the Bar, and Spender so far deferred to that predilection as to begin eating dinners at the

*None the less the Master, in a diplomatic addendum to a letter soliciting a subscription towards the cost of a new cricket-ground for the college, did so far accept established facts as to write: "I should be glad to hear that you are prospering, and that you like the life of a journalist, which indeed is a very interesting one and may do great good.—But how any mortal can stand the wear and tear of it I hardly understand." The date was Jan. 30th, 1890; Spender was at that time editing the *Eastern Morning News*.

Inner Temple. It seems doubtful whether he ever meant to be called; at any rate he never was.

A journalist Spender could hardly be at Oxford (he did, while still up, get a few articles printed by the *Pall Mall*, but appears to have taken no part in University journalism) but a politician he could be and was. Apart from the Union there were in Balliol the Carlyle and Brackenbury Clubs, as well as the more exclusive Devorguila, to which Spender never aspired. Of the two University Liberal Clubs, the Palmerston and the Russell, the latter being the more Radical, he affected the Russell, and on a day famous both in its history and his own he brought down to one of its meetings Henry George, then at the height of his single-tax evangelism—but the best that can be said of the occasion is that the speaker escaped without physical injury from the tumult his hot-gospelling created.

But it is in more intimate coteries that at the university mind meets mind, lessons are learned and influences spread. There were two at least in which Spender as undergraduate learned and (quite certainly) taught. The more important, known commonly as "the inner circle", and sometimes more satirically as "the upper circle", gathered under the leadership of Arthur Acland—a member of Gladstone's Cabinet in 1892—and fired by the social enthusiasm of Arnold Toynbee, who died in 1883, the very year in which a visit by Samuel Barnett to Oxford led to the first attempt to give fulfilment to Toynbee's hopes through the foundation of Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel. Spender was among the foremost supporters of the project, though it seems that he had for a moment hesitations about it. Canon Barnett addressed a meeting on the subject in Balliol Hall, and it was in Cosmo Lang's rooms at Balliol that the decision to found a settlement in East London was taken, Spender and E. T. Cook, his future editor on both the *Pall Mall* and the *Westminster*, being among the company that evening.

Here I may, perhaps, interpose memories—for which I am indebted to Dr. F. S. Boas—of one other Oxford evening. There was at the university in the early eighties a rather esoteric literary society, known, I believe, as "The Passionate Pilgrims".* Spender was for a

*In his fragment of autobiography Sir Arthur Quiller Couch writes: "In 1883–4 a small literary club, 'The Passionate Pilgrims', used to hale him [Pater] from his rooms in Brasenose and plant him, amid our councils, upon a hearthrug with his back to the fire. There he would sit, cross-legged, with the light flickering over his baldish cranium, his moustaches pendulous in the shadow: a somewhat Oriental figure, oracular when his lips opened and he spoke, which was seldom." *Memories and Opinions*, by Q, p. 75.

time secretary of it, and on the night in question was discharging his secretarial functions at Walter Pater's rooms at Brasenose. Pater meanwhile was discharging his views on the classical and romantic in poetry and could brook no delay for formalities, with the result that for some moments secretary and host were giving several utterance simultaneously. Spender, it is safe to affirm, soon yielded place.

The other circle I have mentioned was at once more settled and more informal. Its centre was a house in the High, opposite St. Mary's, where Spender took rooms in varied conjunction with Charles Mallet, Anthony Hawkins, Alfred Kalisch, the musical critic, W. E. Bowen, son of Lord Justice Bowen and nephew of the Harrow song-writer, and Edward Coghlan, a future Judge in Egypt, a Marlburian friend of Hawkins and the only non-Balliol man of the company—whose number, it is recorded, was brought up to eight by the presence of a dog called Stubbs, described as suffering from perpetual indigestion, and a hornet, the property of Coghlan, bearing the equally pertinent name of Freeman. Here, in what became the daily resort of men from all colleges, primarily Balliol, Spender passed his last year at Oxford, in the midst of profitable distractions which no doubt helped him to lose his First in Greats and to gain something considerably better. The foundations Oxford gave him remained essentially his foundations throughout life.

Chapter II

FIRST EDITORSHIP

At the end of the Trinity term of 1885 Spender went down from Oxford with no money in his pocket, and no clear ideas about earning any. In spite of his exhibition he had had to practise strict economy at Balliol; one of his letters home during a vacation visit to Durham contains an earnest appeal for the transmission of the modest sum of 10/–, as "I may otherwise not have enough to bring me home", a request reverted to later with the perhaps calculated reminder, "please send the 10/– in *gold*". The decision regarding a career was therefore a matter of some urgency. But what was the decision to be? Spender had no leanings towards the Church, and

it was useless to consider the Bar seriously, even though he did begin eating dinners to please Jowett, for he could not support himself while reading for the examinations and then waiting for lagging briefs. There seemed nothing for it but schoolmastering, and he accordingly put down his name with one of the recognised firms of agents. Journalism, it is clear (in spite of Lord Lang's assertion that it was what most of his friends thought him destined for) was something into which Spender fell by accident rather than forced a way by design. Not only that, but having fallen into it he almost fell out of it again, and indeed for a short period did. It is true that, as already mentioned, while at Oxford he sent a few notes and short articles to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and had some of them accepted, but he did not at the time see in that a basis for a life's career.

That he did not think more seriously of journalism is rather surprising in view of the family associations with that profession. Dr. Spender's sister Caroline, Alfred's aunt, had married a Radical politician notable in his time, William Saunders, a fervent apostle of Henry George and an enterprising adventurer in the field of newspaper promotion. In 1860 he founded the *Western Morning News* at Plymouth, and in 1864 the *Eastern Morning News* at Hull, putting in his brother-in-law, Alfred's uncle, Edward Spender, to edit the former. He was a pioneer in the news-agency field, founding first the Central Press, and then, after disposing of that profitably to the Conservative Party, the Central News Agency. If Alfred Spender had serious thoughts of journalism he might have been expected to sound his uncle on the subject. Actually it was his uncle who sounded him—but not with regard to journalism. William Saunders was at this time standing as Liberal candidate for the Eastern Division of Hull, and, being in need of a private secretary, he bethought him of his young Oxford nephew, who, in spite of the obvious disqualification of years wasted over a university education, might possibly be made to do; at any rate the salary offered, £2 a week, was no great sum to risk. Spender considered the proposal, and before he had given an answer Uncle William, who was just starting for a short tour through Wiltshire with Joseph Chamberlain and Jesse Collings to study rural conditions, invited Alfred to join the party in some undefined capacity, perhaps to give uncle and nephew the opportunity of inspecting each other at close quarters.

Driving through Wiltshire in a carriage and pair in such company was an experience in itself, and served—in conjunction with the news of a second in Greats, and the consequent extinction of any

hope of a Fellowship—to turn the scale in favour of the private secretaryship. It turned out to be a private secretaryship *sui generis*. Mr. Saunders conducted his political campaign from the offices of his Hull paper, and there his secretary was installed—an arrangement which, *inter alia*, helped considerably to solve the problem of prosperity on £2 a week. The problem, in fact, seems to have troubled Spender little. "I got bed and breakfast and a very decent lodging for 10/- a week," he wrote later, "and since I went to bed at 3 a.m. and breakfasted at 11 a.m. I dispensed with lunch, and the *Eastern Morning News*, my uncle's paper, gave me tea, and a sandwich supper at midnight. So I only wanted dinner, and that I got extremely well for one and twopence a day". In much the same spirit had another notable journalist and biographer written a century and a half earlier, "I dined very well for eightpence, with very good company, at the Pine Apple in New Street. . . . I had a cut of meat for sixpence, and bread for a penny, and gave the waiter a penny; so I was quite well served, nay, better than the rest, for they gave the waiter nothing". The future editor of the *Westminster* would seem on the whole to have fared a little better than the future editor of the *Rambler*.

Very soon, though still almost by inadvertence, the private secretary who took to reporting his employer's speeches, and then to writing leaders on them, found himself metamorphosed into a journalist, and when, after the employer's return to Parliament, the editor of the *Eastern Morning News* wanted a short holiday the private secretary was elevated temporarily to the editorial chair. Fortune manifestly had smiled, and the question of a career seemed decided. But Fortune is nothing if not capricious, and can turn at any minute from smiles to frowns. The editor having returned and resumed his functions, the acting-editor was presented by his relative and proprietor with a formidable list of delinquencies, and the sum of £10 in lieu of notice. The delinquencies were all imaginary or ridiculous, but Spender was probably not really sound on Henry George. At any rate a new situation, its salient features a capital of £10 and an income of nil, was created, and the problem of life had to be faced afresh. As a beginning a small income was secured from free-lancing in London, whither, for no particular reason, he gravitated. It was precarious, as most free-lance work is, but it sufficed to keep the capital intact. At the same time Spender obtained an introduction out of which little immediately, but much subsequently, sprang. By 1886 John Morley had forsaken journalism for politics, but memories of his editorship of the

Fortnightly Review and the *Pall Mall Gazette* made his counsel something which young aspirants in the journalistic field sought eagerly. Spender had met him through Arthur Acland. Morley like any experienced journalist asked the obvious question, and gave the recognized advice. What did Mr. Spender propose to write *about*? Mr. Spender had not thought that out very fully. The best thing, in any case, that Mr. Spender could do was to go back to the provinces and learn journalism there; a man called Stead, who had succeeded Mr. Morley on the *Pall Mall*, was making a success of that, because he had learned how to make a success of a paper in Darlington.

Spender, like other young men who have sought counsel, heard the advice respectfully—and disregarded it. Instead of searching for a vacancy in the provinces he decided for more free-lancing, and settled down at Toynbee Hall, undeflected from this resolve by a crushing verdict he had received on three articles submitted to Le Sage of the *Daily Telegraph*. Le Sage did, indeed, so far depress him about journalism that he once more registered with one or two scholastic agencies, but Canon Barnett gave him invaluable encouragement, and Toynbee, then as now, was a place where men hear of things. Spender heard, whether through Toynbee or not, that a job was going on the *Echo*, under that singular personality Passmore Edwards. The *Echo* was the oldest of the evening papers of that day, all of them, except the *Evening Standard*, now dead; it sold, moreover, for a halfpenny, while the others cost a penny. Passmore Edwards, best known through the public libraries he endowed, had acquired it in 1876, sold the controlling interest to Andrew Carnegie in 1884, and almost immediately bought it back at double the price. In view of such financial vagaries it is perhaps not surprising (though to Spender it seemed incredible) that he should have arranged with the applicant from Toynbee to attend the office from eight to eleven each morning to do any odd writing required, at a salary of six guineas a week. It was wonderful while it lasted,—and it lasted three months, from April to July 1886. Edwards was impossible to please, and when Spender was about to take a fortnight's holiday it was intimated that the *Echo* would not require his services at the end of it.

So one more blow fell, but Spender took it with wise philosophy. With whatever of his thirteen times six guineas he had been able to save he went off with his mother to Switzerland and forgot life's problems among the mountains. Then Fortune's wheel started whirling once more. The day after his return to England he went

down with malignant scarlet fever, which kept him in hospital for six weeks. Just before he came out a letter arrived from Passmore Edwards, offering him another chance on the *Echo*, and within a few hours of that a letter from his uncle, William Saunders, offering him another chance on the *Eastern Morning News*,—another chance, indeed, in the editorial chair, at a salary rising dizzily to an ultimate £5 a week. The alternatives needed consideration, but Passmore Edwards was unsound on the Irish question and Saunders (after some wobbling) sound; and Morley had, after all, said something about learning your trade in the provinces. So to Hull, and an editorship-on-probation, Spender turned his exhilarated steps.

Here was success at last; for (apart from the sordid question of salary) to attain the editorship of a far from negligible provincial daily at the age of twenty-three was no mean achievement. The position, it is true, left its occupant little to do with his Oxford culture except forget it. Hull was an important industrial and commercial centre, and it bought its paper in the morning for shipping news and market prices, not for political leaders or book-reviews. That, on the whole, was just as well, for on no other terms could a paper that was not merely Liberal but Radical, and not merely Radical but crank-Radical (for Henry George and the single tax still filled its proprietor's firmament) have commanded the support of a community predominantly and not too intelligently Conservative. Mr. Saunders did, it is true, get elected once as Member for East Hull, but he owed that success mainly to the class of voter who did not buy a penny paper. Those who did—and the *Eastern Morning News* was the only penny paper they could buy—were his political opponents. In such circumstances the paper continued to exist but failed to thrive. It was, in fact, losing money, and its proprietor, who had no suspicion of the part his own views played in that, was not inclined to lose much more. That was the first discovery Spender made when he took over in October, 1886. The second was that Hull, complete antithesis to Oxford though it might be in many ways, possessed interests and attractions that grew steadily more compelling. There was good country close at hand, plenty of cricket and tennis available, the new problems of industry and economics to solve, municipal government to study and comment on, social evils to combat and other wrongs to right—a world in short which an Oxford Greats course had done little to reveal. Spender made no mistake in his assessment of true values. Half a century afterwards he put his full debt to Hull into words (in a letter to Herbert Worsley). "When I went to Hull 55 years

ago straight from Oxford," he wrote, "I felt the need of getting away from it, and plunged into the life of the place, spending hours in police-courts, on 'change or with shipping magnates, railway directors, bankers, trade union leaders, trying to get the hang of it for the daily newspaper of which I became editor when I was twenty-three. This has been of immense use to me in after-days, for it gave me an outlook which put learning and all that in its place."

Spender's life in Hull (where he settled down in Linnaeus Street, off the Anlaby Road) was considerably different from anything in his subsequent career. He was in supreme charge of a morning paper, and had to give part of his time to the business side in addition to editorial work which was, if anything, rather more than a full-time job in itself. The night's work began at eight, and the editor aimed at getting to bed by four; he was in the office again by 11.30 in the morning to deal with the management side, and stayed there till two—which left the afternoon and early evening for recreation and incidentals. In a passage dealing with this period in his *Life, Journalism and Politics* Spender gives an interesting picture of life in a provincial newspaper-office sixty years ago.

> "We went in," he wrote, "at eight o'clock in the evening, and for the next three hours were disposing of the local news and writing any leaders or comments that were necessary on local affairs. Then the decks were cleared for high politics. The London Letter came in a parcel by train about eleven, and was supplemented by late paragraphs which were telegraphed. But our chief material was reports of public speeches, which poured in on a detestable 'flimsy' from about half-past ten till one in the morning. We were by no means in the first flight of provincial papers, but it never occurred to us as possible that speeches by Gladstone, Salisbury, Chamberlain or Hartington should receive less than the full honours of a verbatim report, and we were often in grave doubt whether we were doing right in reducing others to a column in the third person. Often we came out with five solid columns of the utterances of these eminent beings, and a terrible business it was to get them to press in coherent form. The 'flimsy' would be unintelligible or illegible; whole sheets would be missing and others wrongly numbered. In despair I have written and put into Mr. Gladstone's mouth eloquent sentences which he ought to have spoken, and which at any rate seemed necessary to make his peroration suit his exordium. And in the intervals of these struggles something called a leading article,

attacking or defending the speaker, had to be written and sent to press before the last part of the speech had arrived."

That is a good description of old-time journalism as it was in those days in centres far enough from London for the London dailies not to be available till midday or later. It was strenuous work, but Spender was young and strong. Full command of a paper like the *Eastern Morning News* was a notable responsibility for a man barely twelve months down from Oxford, and with Gladstone on the one side and Salisbury and Chamberlain on the other in full force, politics were exciting enough for a journalist who cared as much about politics as Spender did. But at Hull he was doing much more than merely keeping a paper going. He was exercising leadership and throwing himself into crusades, notably one for the condemnation of local slum areas, an enterprise in which the final victory was owed less to the support of the Archbishop of York and other dignitaries, valuable though that was, than to the opportune outbreak of an epidemic of typhus, which at last galvanised the apathetic authorities into action. But there were various vicissitudes, one of them, an attack of pleurisy and pneumonia which laid the young editor low seventeen months after he took office, nearly proving the end of the editorship and all else. But Spender pulled partially round, went off to the Engadine with his mother, spent a rainy July and August in a hotel where the only other guest turned out to be Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, and in September, in defiance of the doctor, was back at his desk in Whitefriargate; the year was 1888, and he had been absent for more than half of it.

Before he left Hull, Spender had built up an able and congenial staff. His assistant-editor was an Oxford man like himself, H. W. Orange, who, after doing distinguished administrative work in India, wound up his official career at home as Sir Hugh, Accountant-General to the Board of Education. Harold Cox and Spender's younger brother Harold, also just down from Oxford, were doing the London Letter, and somewhere in the purlieus was a boy of sixteen, whose future in national journalism was to be as outstanding as Spender's own. Mr. J. L. Garvin has given me his memories of that far-off day. He had come to Hull as a boy with an elder brother who had bought a school there, and tried his hand at various trades, particularly the electrical, for which he had a special liking and aptitude. But politics was in his system; he was then a Radical, a Home Ruler and an Imperialist, and all a journalist's urge

to self-expression was in his blood. It found release in letters on public questions to the *Eastern Morning News*. They were almost invariably printed, and one day when the youthful writer in some dejection hunted in the correspondence columns in vain for his latest contribution he found it, to his astonishment, in print a size larger than usual, in the most prominent position in the paper next to the leader. Having attained that place of honour he was accorded it regularly, and at the same time the Editor repeatedly asked his correspondent to come and see him. The correspondent, however, realising the disillusionment the spectacle of his callow youth must create, consistently made excuse. At last, in 1888 or 1889, he gave way, and called at the *Eastern Morning News* office by appointment. He was shown up to a dim room, where by a green-shaded desk-lamp the strikingly attractive young editor, with a fine and well-poised head surrounded by reddish-tawny curls, was sitting. He looked up to explain to his rather self-conscious visitor that he was at that moment expecting someone else, and took up a speaking-tube to ask his secretary to send up Mr. Garvin. The visitor, who admits to looking even younger than he was, diffidently disclosed his identity, Spender thereat throwing his hands high above his head in an astonishment that defied utterance. The most cordial of conversations followed, but, as it turned out, the acquaintanceship thus struck was not destined to be carried far then, for both men left Hull shortly after, Garvin to take the road that led him by way of the *Newcastle Chronicle* to the editorship of the *Pall Mall* and the *Observer*, Spender to take the road that led him by way of the *Pall Mall* to the editorship of the *Westminster*. "You see," said Garvin fifty-four years afterwards, "what I owe to Spender. It is an immense thing when a man who knows says to you, 'You can'."*

Sir Hugh Orange, casting his memory back like Garvin, paints very much the same picture of Spender at Hull.

> "In appearance at that time," he writes, "there was something that suggested a young and gifted artist, thoughtful, eager and responsive. He was a man of the most equable temperament that I have ever encountered. For nearly eighteen months I sat

*In March 1905 Garvin, then editing the *Outlook*, wrote from the office of that paper: "We have never met since the days long ago in Hull when you made yourself responsible in the *Eastern Morning News* for my literary existence. You have quite forgotten, but the impress of your writing even in those days counted for something in helping the pupil to think for himself and even to differ from his master."

nightly for six hours opposite to him at the same table under one flaring gaslight. We often were working against time; and he was often being interrupted at his work. But during the whole period of our association I never once saw him flustered or put out or impatient; from first to last our companionship was entirely unclouded and unruffled".

What Sir Hugh says of Spender's office methods and of his journalistic ideals I quote in a later chapter. It will be enough here to add one more personal touch:

"He was a man of exceptional ability and exceptional charm, and obviously on the highway to the eminence which he soon attained after his marriage and his transplantation to London. It also seemed to me that his powers continued to increase right through his life. He wrote with a firmer grasp and a more flexible and compressed style when he was seventy-two years of age than when Ministers and the public were eagerly attentive to his daily utterances at the age of thirty-six."

But Spender's stay at Hull was not lengthy. Two influences conspired curiously to set a term to his connexion with the *Eastern Morning News*. In 1886, as I have said, after coming down from Oxford, he settled at Toynbee Hall with "the little pale clergyman" to whose talks at Balliol and other colleges Toynbee had owed its origin. There, in January of that year, he met a Miss Rawlinson, engaged at Toynbee in one of the many forms of social work which Samuel Barnett was inspiring. Her father was head of the old-established City silk firm of Pearsall; her home was at Campden Hill, and her family was intimate with Robert Louis Stevenson.* How

*In 1886 Miss Rawlinson was being painted by Richmond. So, as it happened, was R.L.S. During the sittings either Mrs. or Miss Rawlinson mentioned that they were going to Bournemouth for a few days. Then, said Richmond decisively, they must go and see Stevenson. They did, and in April of that year Stevenson wrote to a friend from Skerryvore: "We have all had a great pleasure; a Mrs. Rawlinson came and brought with her a nineteen-year-old daughter, simple, human, as beautiful as—herself; I never admired a girl before, you know it was my weakness: we are all three dead in love with her."

The next year Stevenson left Bournemouth, and England, and when Miss Rawlinson became engaged to Alfred Spender he was at Vailima. But to her letter telling her news he sent a long reply. It is to be found *in extenso* in Stevenson's *Letters*, but two passages may be quoted here:

"Will you give my heartiest congratulations to Mr. S.? He has my admiration; he is a brave man; when I was young I should have run away from the

far she impressed Spender must be inferred from subsequent events, but it seems clear that the frequency of his business journeys from Hull to London were not dictated exclusively by business exigencies; however, since in the course of one of them he made the acquaintance of Mr. Gladstone, on that occasion at least neither the time nor the fare could be said to have been wasted. His sardonic uncle observed the course of events in silence, and when in November 1890 Alfred Spender became definitely engaged to Mary Rawlinson (evoking a characteristic letter of congratulation from R.L.S. and another from Andrew Lang), and thereupon proceeded to expatiate on the importance of his spending the autumn in London in order to follow Parliament on the spot, Uncle William rejoined that his nephew might certainly come to London if he chose, but not as editor of the *Eastern Morning News*. He did choose, and in March 1891 found himself once more unemployed, and once more in residence at Toynbee Hall, where the whole chain of circumstance had begun. Barnett, of course, was still there, and one of the constituents of Barnett's greatness was his capacity to give any man faith in himself and faith in his future. Thus stimulated, Spender started free-lancing again. At the same time he produced his first book, a volume on Old Age Pensions, commissioned by a publisher some sixteen years before that humane and politic social reform became a reality. Toynbee was an admirable laboratory for social study, and it would seem that John Morley, who had given Spender sound if neglected advice about his journalism six years before, had seen something of the book in its early stages. But relations between the old journalist and the young, who were to be so intimate in later days, was still formal, as Morley's letter acknowledging receipt of the book shows. As a tribute from a weighty and discerning critic to Spender's first piece of extended work it deserves full quotation here.

My dear Sir,

I am extremely glad to receive your volume on Old Age Pensions. What I saw of its contents in an earlier stage convinced me that no more useful contribution to this intricate and im-

sight of you, pierced with the sense of my unfitness. He is more wise and manly."

"When Mr. S. is very rich he must bring you round the world and let you see our new home, and see the old gentleman and the old lady. I mean to live quite a long time yet, and my wife must do the same, or else I couldn't manage it; so you will have plenty of time."

But they had not plenty of time. In less than four years R.L.S. was dead.

portant subject has yet been made. I am particularly struck by the chapters on the actual condition of the labouring poor in old age; the information which these chapters contain is new, is compactly stated, and is most instructive. Your little volume makes an admirable manual of the whole subject, and everybody who takes an interest in the subject will be grateful to you for a piece of downright good work.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN MORLEY.

J. A. SPENDER, ESQ.

Here was encouragement indeed to the young journalist inscribing himself thus indelibly on the roll of authors—and since the journalism at that moment consisted of no more than free-lancing, praise from a distinguished man of letters must have been doubly grateful. For free-lancing was at this time once more Spender's fate—not a step upwards in the profession for a man who had for nearly four years held an important editorship. But he fared reasonably well, mainly through articles accepted by his old paper the *Echo*, and also by the *Pall Mall*, with which he thus renewed a casual connection dating as far back as his Oxford days. Passmore Edwards, still owner of the *Echo*, was as unaccountable as ever, but Spender had at least the satisfaction of having held up to him as model, in the course of one of the periodical admonitions, an anonymous article in the *Pall Mall* —of which, as it happened, he was himself the author. But it is not practicable to marry on free-lancing, not at any rate if there is a prospective father-in-law with a sound business head in the background, and at the beginning of 1892 the desired union seemed as far off as ever. Then, suddenly came one more of Fortune's turns. E. T. Cook was at that time editing the *Pall Mall Gazette*, with Edmund Garrett as his assistant, and when Garrett suddenly fell ill and his place had to be temporarily filled, Cook remembered that one of his occasional contributors had had good experience of the inside of a newspaper-office in the provinces. So Spender came in as *locum tenens*, and having got there stayed there, for Garrett, instead of recovering and coming back, recovered and went out to South Africa to edit the *Cape Times*. Accordingly, in June 1892, Alfred Spender became assistant-editor of the *Pall Mall*, and in July he was married to Miss Rawlinson; her father gave the young couple a house, 29 Cheyne Walk, which happened, by a chance that proved of considerable journalistic value to Spender, to be next door to that of his old Oxford friend Arthur Acland, who was to become

within a few weeks President of the Board of Education (or its then equivalent) in Mr. Gladstone's last administration.

Of Spender's married life, and what it meant to him over a full fifty years, I shall say little. His published works tell something of the story, his private letters much more. Mrs. Spender shared all his thought and much of his activities. She went with him to Egypt, to India, to America, and of course accompanied him on all his shorter holidays. They were perhaps drawn the closer in that the marriage was childless. In the hospital at Tankerton, near Whitstable, which she founded in 1897 for tubercular cases and directed in its different forms till 1921, Spender took as much pride and satisfaction as she did. In his last long illness his dominating concern was for her comfort and welfare after he had gone, his gratitude for her care and admiration for her capability was ceaseless, and his supreme desire, expressed again and again in letters to his friends as the inevitable end was visibly approaching, was that he might live to keep with his wife the fiftieth anniversary of their wedding-day. Little of that long partnership could be imagined in July 1892, when Spender and his bride went off on their wedding-tour. Little of it would he have wished different as the thankful heart triumphed over all the anguish of the racked body in a war-time June in 1942. July 1942 he did not see.

Chapter III

THE *WESTMINSTER*

The *Pall Mall Gazette*, the evening paper in whose office Spender found himself installed as assistant-editor in September 1892, had had (compared, for example, with *The Globe*, which was founded in 1803) a brief, but a consistently brilliant, career. It had been founded in 1865 by George Smith, of the publishing firm Smith, Elder, with Frederick Greenwood as editor. The paper was modelled on the *Anti-Jacobin* of some seventy years earlier; its title was taken from Thackeray's *Pendennis*; its price was twopence; and though it was intended to be independent it was in fact unswervingly Conservative from the first day of Greenwood's editorship to the last. But it is proprietors, not editors, who determine a paper's politics, and in 1880 came one of those precipitate changes of ownership which

have swung so many London papers, alive and dead, from one profession of political conviction to the opposite. George Smith lost interest in the *Pall Mall* and handed it over to his son-in-law Henry Yates Thompson, regardless of the apparently immaterial fact that Mr. Thompson happened to be not a Conservative but an ardent Liberal. The *Pall Mall* accordingly hauled down one flag and ran up another, Greenwood ceased to be editor, and his place was taken (after the exercise of considerable persuasion) by John Morley, with W. T. Stead, fresh from a successful editorship of the *Northern Echo* at Darlington, as his assistant. Morley had been editing the *Fortnightly Review* for some years, but it may be questioned whether he was the right man for a paper like the *Pall Mall*. At any rate he stayed there only three years, Stead moving up to the editorial chair, with a Balliol man, Alfred Milner, as his second-in-command; the price had meanwhile been reduced to a penny. Milner did not stay long, and another Balliol man, E. T. Cook, who took his place, steered the paper efficiently during the period when Stead was serving a sentence in Holloway gaol as the result of a technical offence committed during the collection of material for his sensational articles on "the maiden tribute". Stead resigned his editorship in 1889 to take over responsibility for the *Review of Reviews*, and once more the assistant-editor, in this case Cook, moved up, his term of office dating from January 1st 1890. He had therefore been editor for nearly three years when Spender (Balliol yet again) joined the paper as assistant-editor in September 1892.

The *Pall Mall* was then a highly influential Liberal paper, as influential indeed within its circulation-area as the Liberal morning papers, *The Daily News* and *Daily Chronicle*, but Spender's advent fell in a period of considerable political stress for the party. It is true that it won a general election just as he was taking up his duties, but, with a working majority of only forty (including the Irish), an octogenarian Prime Minister, and internal dissensions already evident, the outlook was as depressing as the event proved. But none of this was calculated to depress Spender himself. Lifted as he now was from the vicissitudes of free-lancing to the apparent security of a good post on a well-established paper, he might well congratulate himself on the sound professional and pecuniary foundation on which he was basing his new married life. But amply justified as such optimism was, it was shattered in six weeks. Everything appeared to be, and for the moment was, going well; Cook showed his confidence in his assistant-editor by leaving him in charge while he himself departed for a holiday in Italy; Mr. Gladstone showed equal

confidence in the acting-editor by sending him little notes containing comments or suggestions; and the proprietor went out of his way to indicate his satisfaction with the acting-editor's conduct of the paper. Suddenly, while Cook was still at Biella, the thunderbolt fell. Yates Thompson, the Liberal proprietor of the *Pall Mall*, was offered £50,000 for it by—as it was ultimately revealed—the Conservative W. W. Astor (father of the present Lord Astor, chief proprietor of the *Observer* and Col. J. J. Astor, chief proprietor of *The Times*) and thought the proposal too good to be turned down. There was only one course open to any self-respecting member of the editorial staff. Cook and Spender and everyone else who counted resigned, and less than three months after a marriage made possible by the acquisition of settled prospects Spender found himself once more among the unemployed.

It was a swift, almost a shattering, turn of fortune, but another almost as swift was to put matters right so far as Spender was concerned. Thanks to the enterprise and public spirit of a wealthy magazine-proprietor, Mr. (later Sir George) Newnes, a new ship was launched for the old crew, and the colour-scheme of the London evening Press, which already included a pink *Globe*, was enriched by the appearance of a new sea-green *Westminster Gazette*. The interval between the latest *volte face* of the *Pall Mall* and the publication of the first issue of the *Westminster* was brief. The final break between the *Pall Mall's* new proprietors and the *Pall Mall's* old staff came on October 7th 1892. On October 8th Mr. Newnes wrote to Cook suggesting the foundation of a new evening paper on the lines of the *Pall Mall*. On January 31st 1893 the first number of the journal to whose fortunes all the best years of Spender's life were devoted was on sale in the streets.

Having regard to what the *Westminster* meant to Spender, the story of its inception deserves a few more lines. The sale of the *Pall Mall* was, of course, common knowledge, and Mr. Newnes, who lived at Putney Heath, happened to talk of it during one of his frequent Sunday morning walks on the Heath with his friend and neighbour Mr. P. R. S. Tomalin, the chief proprietor of Jaeger's. Newnes remarked casually that there was a chance here for a good Liberal to render a considerable service to the party by starting a new Liberal paper to replace the no longer Liberal *Pall Mall*. "Why don't *you* do it?" said Tomalin, no less casually. Newnes reflected for a moment and observed, "I think I will." Hence the letter to Cook, followed two days later by an interview in which the whole matter was settled. Newnes acceded unreservedly to all Cook's

stipulations as to editorial freedom, and all that remained was to push through the material business of securing offices (premises were in the end built in Tudor Street, between Fleet Street and the Embankment), arranging for the printing of the paper and collecting a staff. The last task was the simplest, for Cook naturally gave all the chief posts to the colleagues who had left the *Pall Mall* with him, Spender passing as a matter of course from the assistant-editorship of the old paper to the same position on the new. All this took time, and, as stated, it was not till January 31st 1893 that the first issue of the *Westminster*, printed on the *Daily Chronicle's* machines (because the new machinery Newnes had ordered was not delivered in time) appeared. The decision to print on green paper was Newnes's, dictated partly by a desire to be distinctive, partly by a belief that green was restful to the eye. At whose door responsibility for the paper's name is to be laid no one has ever appeared to know. Suggestions were numerous and varied;* *Westminster Gazette* must have been among them, and on that the new editor and proprietor decided. Before the paper had seen the end of its first decade the name had come to stand for something unique in English journalism, for of no other paper could it be said with the same assurance that it was bought first and foremost for its leading article.

Spender spent close on thirty years on the *Westminster*, covering the whole period of its existence as an evening paper, from the first day to the last. For over twenty-six of the thirty he was editor, and it is as Editor of the *Westminster* that he will be remembered as long as the great names in English journalism survive in memory at all. But first came the three years of assistant-editorship under Cook, whom, it will be recalled, he had served in the same capacity on the *Pall Mall* for less than three months. Those three years mark the beginning of his settled life. It was a notable epoch for a young man of thirty, deeply engrossed in politics, laying the foundations of what he hoped would be a lifelong career in political journalism in London. A General Election had just returned a Liberal Government to power after six years of Conservative administration, but

*"Lord Rosebery suggested *The Thames*, which was voted 'too muddy'. I think it was George Meredith who proposed the *P.M.*, with its double significance temporal and political. A very strong claimant was *The Strand*, but Mr. Newnes had already annexed this for a popular magazine. Among other suggestions were, *The Torch*, *The New Gazette*, *The Clock*, *The Argus*, *The Beacon*, *The Pilot*, *The Tribune*, *The Forum*, *The Night Mail*, *The St. Paul's Gazette*, *The Patriot*, *The Moment*, *The Messenger*, *The Charing Cross Gazette*, *The Sun*—the list is almost interminable."—*Sir Edward Cook*, by J. Saxon Mills, p. 133.

its majority was so precarious that Parliamentary debates night after night were bound to be, if not always front-page news (though actually news on front pages was a thing unthought-of in those days), at any rate always, or with rare exceptions, subjects for those political leaders of which Spender was to be in later years the acknowledged master. Expectations of political excitement were not disappointed. The new Government, recklessly indifferent about overloading the ship, or alternatively reckless to the point of folly about "filling up the cup" of public indignation with the wreckers in the Lords, introduced forthwith no fewer than three major measures, a Home Rule Bill to antagonise all Conservatives and Unionists, a Local Veto Bill to antagonise all the licensed trade and a Welsh Church Disestablishment Bill to antagonise all but a fraction of faithful Anglicans. None of the measures reached the Statute-book; only one of them, the Home Rule Bill, got as far as the Lords, who rejected it by the spectacular majority of 419 to 41. Gladstone was eighty-two when the session opened, eighty-four when he resigned in March 1894. That meant lively speculation about whom the Queen would send for—Lord Spencer, whom Gladstone would have recommended if his counsel had been invited, which it was not; Harcourt, whom half the party would have refused to serve under; or Rosebery, whose natural perverseness, coupled with certain Imperialist tendencies, made him something of an unknown quantity as leader. Rosebery it turned out to be, but that was no help journalistically to Spender, who, intimate though he became later with the new Premier, did not make his acquaintance till after the end of his brief term of office.

But the Government lasted long enough to initiate a notable new departure in the field of taxation when, in 1894, Harcourt, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, got the principle of Death Duties embodied for the first time in the Budget—by methods on which Rosebery had something to say in a letter to Spender a couple of years later.* And there were other political signs and portents. One was the election to the House of Commons of Keir Hardie and John Burns, the latter as a Liberal, the former as the first Labour Member pure and simple. In 1893 the Independent Labour Party came into being, with its demand—still, after fifty years, unsatisfied—for the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Unemployment was causing growing concern, rising at moments to alarm; the smash of the Liberator Building Society and the flight of its founder, Jabez Balfour (whom Spender had a hand

*Page 103

in bringing to justice), was reducing thousands of middle-class homes from comfort to distress; Oscar Wilde was being tried and sentenced; and Uganda, thanks to the efforts of the man who was then Captain Frederick Lugard, was being added to the Empire despite the initial opposition of all the Liberal Cabinet except Rosebery. Whatever an alert and well-informed young journalist might find life, he could hardly find it dull.

And it is plain from his own record of that period that Spender did not. His work, indeed, while he was assistant-editor, was of wider and more varied interest than in later days. He did some leader-writing, though naturally the bulk of that fell to Cook. Sometimes it was shared quite remarkably. "During the days I worked with Cook," Spender wrote, "our co-operation was so timed and dovetailed that we often wrote the leader in two parts, one assigned to him and one to me, and contrived under pressure to produce it in twenty-five minutes." Since the leader was usually over a thousand words the achievement is notable on grounds of speed alone, but the subject must have been thoroughly discussed beforehand, and when a competent journalist knows clearly what he wants to say it does not commonly take him long to say it. Spender adds that he has never been able to operate such a partnership with anyone else, and astonishingly though it seems to have succeeded in this case the experiment is hardly one to be recommended.

But this was not the main part of the assistant-editor's work. He reviewed anything up to a dozen books a week, half of them novels; he was the paper's art critic, and in a series of articles, subsequently published in pamphlet form, he attacked his fellow-critics (how familiar the indictment sounds still) for log-rolling and narrow-mindedness and blind devotion to the *dernier cri*: he assailed similarly the decadent and sex-exploiting school of novelists, and again the articles secured a brief reprieve from oblivion through their appearance in volume form. At the same time he took up the Liberator case, explored Jabez Balfour's financial transactions to their depths and exposed his iniquities (or, to say the least, irregularities) in another set of articles which—yet again—were duly reprinted as a pamphlet. Balfour had absconded to the Argentine, and by a series of shifts he evaded the operation of the British Government's application for his extradition for two years. But at last he was brought back, tried and sentenced to fourteen years penal servitude—this to the genuine dismay of Spender, who thought that three years imprisonment would be a fit penalty, and declared

that if he had foreseen such a sentence as fourteen years he would never have touched the case at all.

So the three years from the beginning of 1893 to the end of 1895 were spent. Throughout them Spender was steadily strengthening his position in London journalism. Fortunate in his native gifts, he was no less fortunate in his friendships. Next door to him in Chelsea was his old Oxford friend Arthur Acland, now one of Gladstone's Ministers, who, without disclosing or coming near disclosing Cabinet secrets, gave Spender constantly assessments of the political situation at a given moment, or of some particular aspect of it, based on an inner knowledge which few men outside the Cabinet could possess. Tom Ellis, another Oxford friend and a Junior Whip, was close by, and so was Robert Hudson, the future secretary of the National Liberal Federation. Through Acland Spender was put on intimate terms with Edward Marjoribanks (afterwards Lord Tweedmouth), and as a leading Liberal journalist he always had access at 10 Downing Street to the private secretary, varied by rare but notable interviews with Mr. Gladstone himself—though not, it would seem, with Mr. Gladstone's successor, whom he did not meet till later.

Life on these lines might have continued for years longer, for the partnership with Cook worked harmoniously and efficiently, and the assistant-editorship of such a paper as the *Westminster* had already become might well satisfy a much older man than Spender then was. But at the end of 1895 Cook was offered the editorship of the *Daily News*, and there was every reason why he should accept it; the *Westminster*, respected and influential though it was, had only a small circulation, confined almost entirely to the immediate neighbourhood of London, whereas the man who was editing a morning paper like the *Daily News* knew that his voice could reach the whole country. So Cook went, and the chair of the *Westminster* was left vacant. Who, all Fleet Street (not least the assistant-editor of the *Westminster*) wondered, was to fill it? There was no lack of applicants, conspicuous among them that brilliant political writer Herbert Paul. The decision lay with the proprietor, Sir George Newnes. Cook himself advised Spender's appointment, but such advice could be taken or left. After all Spender was barely thirty-three, and the freshness and vigour of youth do not necessarily outweigh, where an editorship is concerned, the experience and proved judgement of riper years. But Newnes had been watching his man, and if he hesitated at all it was not for long. His decision is recorded in one of his fragmentary autobiographical notes. "It

would astonish people," he wrote, "if I were to mention by name some of the number of men of high position in the intellectual world who applied for the post. I thought it only right to give the position to Mr. Spender, who had been next in command, and he has ever since occupied it in a manner which I have no hesitation in saying has brought high credit to himself and the paper over which he presides."* Thus, less than a fortnight after his thirty-third birthday, Spender assumed command of the journal he was to edit with outstanding distinction till the evening in 1921 when it appeared on its green paper for the last time, before the unhappy metamorphosis into an unsuccessful and short-lived morning daily.

What may be termed the material structure and external history of the *Westminster* can be quickly sketched. The paper was never a commercial success, though it survived three apparently well-established rivals, *The Pall Mall*, *The Globe*, and the *St. James's Gazette*. Figures which Spender himself quotes show that for the first three years the circulation was about 15,000, rising gradually till 1899, when, with the outbreak of the Boer War, it increased to 25,000. After the war it dropped back to 20,000, but the Great War took it up again to 27,000. This was the highest figure ever reached, and compared with evening paper circulations to-day it is, of course, derisory. To make ends meet in such circumstances is almost impossible, for the distribution of an evening paper, with successive editions to be conveyed all over Greater London by a fleet of motor-vans (or in the *Westminster's* early days by horse-vans and cyclists) is an expensive business. The annual loss was not great, because the whole concern, measured by present-day standards, was on so small a scale. Before 1914 it ranged between £10,000 and £14,000 a year, but rises in costs due to war-conditions more than doubled the deficit, and the position was never retrieved.

These losses Sir George Newnes bore cheerfully for sixteen years, till 1908, when the paper was transferred to a syndicate of well-known Liberals, including Lord Cowdray, Sir Charles Henry, Sir John Brunner, Mr. (now Sir) Frank Newnes, under the chairmanship of Sir Alfred Mond, with Mr. (later Sir) Donald Maclean as secretary. Spender's relations with Newnes had been so uniformly happy that the change could not but evoke certain anxieties in his mind. It certainly did, in the minds of some of his friends. Grey, for example, wrote (on August 23rd):

**Life of Sir George Newnes*, by Hulda Friedrichs, p. 231.

"I had heard that the *Westminster Gazette* was satisfactorily provided for, but after I left you on Friday it occurred to me, from reflecting on one or two things which your wife had said, that the arrangement may not be as satisfactory as I thought, and I was sorry that I had not asked about them. Not that I want to know what they are, but because I should like to be certain that your position is assured. You manage to combine independent thought with unswerving support of the party in a way which is very rare. I think that is what Mr. G. meant by the power of putting one's mind into the common stock, and it makes your articles like the opinion of a valued colleague. I know nothing else in journalism like it, and I should think many of us feel the same about it. So I hope you won't take to water-colours only. Wasn't that what you were to retire on?"

It may have been partly a belief that Spender was feeling his position less secure which led to the suggestion that he might be willing to accept the editorship of the *Tribune*, the penny Liberal morning paper (the other Liberal dailies, the *Daily News* and *Daily Chronicle*, were both still a halfpenny), which, founded two years earlier, in January 1906, was pursuing a highly precarious existence, to be terminated before 1908 was far advanced. Lord Esher recorded in his Journal, under date January 28th, 1908, "Spender called. He had been invited to edit the *Tribune*. This had to be communicated to Pearson, for if *The Times* want him they must hurry." For this last suggestion I find no other authority, nor for the former does any appear to exist in a published document, but confirmation is forthcoming in the form of a letter to Spender from the Master of Elibank, soon to be Chief Liberal Whip, which makes it clear that there had been a definite, even if informal, approach; for the writer, half apologising for his importunity in the matter of the *Tribune*, adds, "my excuse must be that in the Party interest I felt that the paper could only succeed under your guidance as Managing Director". But there was little to tempt Spender in this, and there is no reason to suppose that he ever gave the offer serious thought.

The *Westminster* continued under the new proprietorship as it had under the old, losing money, with an inconsiderable circulation, but undoubtedly commanding a greater weight of influence per reader, having regard to the character of its readers, than any other London paper existing then or since. Lord Cowdray, gradually putting more capital into the paper, had by the end of the Great

War become the chief proprietor, and Spender's relations with him were as uniformly harmonious as they had always been with Newnes. But Cowdray was a business man, and a brilliantly successful one. The £20,000 or so which the *Westminster* was at that time losing meant nothing to him financially, but to be running a losing concern at all cut clean across all his ideas of sound business. He discussed with Spender the possibility of putting the *Westminster* on a sound financial basis. Spender said that under the conditions then prevailing in the newspaper world the thing could not be done, whereupon Cowdray, much more at home with large-scale than with small-scale undertakings, decided he would turn the *Westminster* into a morning paper in competition with the *Daily News*, (which had by that time absorbed the *Morning Leader*) and the *Daily Chronicle*. The prospect of having to risk a million or so on the enterprise troubled him not at all. His idea was that Spender should be editor and political director of the new paper, and Spender at first concurred. But various personal and other considerations (the prospect of beginning night-work again when nearing sixty can hardly have been congenial) led him to relinquish the post without ever having effectively held it, though he continued to be a regular and outstanding contributor to the morning *Westminster* during its six years of undistinguished existence. The paper never looked like succeeding, and early in 1928 it was dead—or, to put it euphemistically, amalgamated with the *Daily News and Leader*. What Lord Cowdray lost on the venture is not known, but it was probably enough to keep the evening *Westminster* going to this day. Spender's active editorship ended with the last issue of the evening paper in October 1921, though he remained nominally editor of the new morning paper for a few months.

It was a great editorship, if that may be said without implying that in the fullest sense Spender was a great editor. He was incontestably a great journalist. He was in all respects an able and competent editor. His eye was on every department of the paper; he was seen constantly in the reporters' room and in the case-room, where the paper was being made up. He fell short in no part of an editor's duties. But he was primarily and essentially a writer; writing rather than organisation was what he cared about, and did supremely well. People bought the *Westminster* not for its news, which on the whole was not as good as some of its rivals' (though Spender could never be got to admit that), but for Spender's leaders, Charles Geake's notes and F. C. G.'s cartoons—practically all of them political. The *Westminster* was a paper of opinion. It

was regarded abroad as well as at home as the most authoritative expression of Liberalism in the British Press; and the voice of Liberalism, it must always be remembered, was from 1906 to 1915 —a period critical both in home and in foreign affairs—the voice of the Government of Great Britain. Spender did not take his views from Ministers; he was more apt to give a lead than to follow one; there was, in particular, no foundation whatever for the assumption so common in foreign diplomatic circles, that the *Westminster* was "Grey's paper". But he profited greatly by knowing what Ministers' views were, and discussing the problems of the moment, as he constantly did, with Asquith and Grey, Haldane and Bryce and McKenna and many other members of the great Liberal Cabinet of 1906 and subsequent years. He was of equal calibre with any of them, and most of them recognised that fully. Abroad, the Kaiser was only one of many politicians and potentates who considered more or less regular study of the *Westminster* necessary to an understanding of the British political scene.*

Two letters addressed to Spender, one when he took up his post as Editor of the *Westminster*, the other when he relinquished it, deserve quotation in part. The first was from T. W. Dunn, Spender's headmaster at Bath College, for whom he entertained throughout his life a profound regard and respect, the second from one who had been his friend and—by virtue of seniority—mentor since Oxford days, Arthur Acland.

"Dear Alfred," Dunn wrote in January 1896, the first month of Spender's editorship. ". . . That you will bring to this office the qualities of integrity, of sober judgment and academic culture, and that those qualities will now have so wide a field, is of course the chief reason of our delight.

I am only fearful that the work of such an appointment will overtax you, and I am all the more concerned because this is just the matter in which a man of your temperament will not be advised. Of course—but this you know better than I, though your knowledge is not likely to govern your practice—your cue is 'Direction, not execution', and you must keep a restful and quiet mind, which alone will enable you to take the larger and more statesmanlike view that marks the character of the good

*He was not the only sovereign who read the *Westminster*. In 1910 Lord Rendel wrote: "In the heart of the Royal Family Lord Knollys is always true to his Liberal convictions, and just now makes the King [Edward VII] read the excellent articles in the *Westminster Gazette*.—(*Personal Letters*, p. 177.)

newspaper. The other conditions of success you know well, I doubt not, and will observe, but they will all be disturbed if you get out of health and lose that judicial calm which depends more on rest and good digestion than the young and strong, who have not yet succumbed or have lightly recovered from collapse, are apt to think. It may be, though you put this warning by, it will recur to your mind as sometimes a wayside omen will, and after all work some effect.

I shall read the *Westminster Gazette* with a watchful ear for any note of the familiar voice, and I can think of nothing that will stir in me a profounder emotion than any noble sentiment I shall find there, the utterance of a much-loved pupil who now commands the ear of the world. You are indeed called to a high office upon earth, and I do not think I have a greater pleasure than the assurance I have that you will do in it worthily. I trust every fair wind will blow for you."

There are phrases there—the reference, for example, to "the qualifications of integrity, of sober judgment and academic culture", which were as true of Spender at every period of his later life as when the discerning headmaster appraised the schoolboy and undergraduate. As for Dunn's counsels about health, Spender rated anything from such a source far too high to dismiss lightly words so wise—though the journalists who hear such advice and follow it are the few, not the many.

Acland's letter was briefer. It was written four months after the evening *Westminster* had ended—the delay being due to the fact that during most of that period Spender had been out of England, attending the Disarmament Conference at Washington; it was only on his return that his abandonment of the editorship was publicly announced.

"My dear Alfred", it ran,

". . . I think you know what I feel about it and about your wonderful journalistic services to this country. I won't repeat what I said in a recent letter. But I carry my mind back to my first acquaintance with you at Oxford, and I recall how I am one of the few perhaps who have known all about your work from the beginning since the days when I went to stay with you at Hull and we walked along the coast.

Well, it is really sad. I daresay you will come and talk some time. How many friends will be writing to you like this or

partly like this, but not many with a friendship of so many years.

Your ever affte friend,

A. H. D. ACLAND."

Behind the restrained language, and key to the interpretation of it, lay a rich content of friendship dating from the days, forty years back, when Acland had done as much as anyone, perhaps more than any one, to shape the political thought and direct the social enthusiasms of the future Editor of the *Westminster* in his freshman's year at Balliol.

Spender, of course, had his critics. Those very qualities of sanity and sincerity and scrupulous fairness which constituted his strength made for a moderation in expression which often left the ardent radical wing of Liberalism, particularly in the triumphant days of 1906, impatient and irritated. A middle course which avoids the extravagances of extremes can never be popular with the extremists of either wing; to them the *via media* is the way of the mugwump. But few editors can ever have received praise so high, from quarters so weighty, as fell constantly to Spender's lot. Not more than a few examples can be quoted here, but for those few it may be claimed that they adequately represent the whole. To a journalist disinterested praise from a fellow-craftsman of proved discrimination is usually as welcome as any. That is the reason for putting first a note from Edward Russell (later Sir Edward, and then Lord Russell of Liverpool), the Editor of the *Liverpool Daily Post.* In reply to a letter from Spender thanking him for an appreciative but anonymous reference in the *Post* to Spender's first few months of editorship of the *Westminster*, Russell wrote:

> "I did write the words. I think they are the first of the kind I ever wrote, but the weighty and yet always interesting character of your articles, the earnest and successful grappling with each successive situation, the straight clear insight, the absence of 'side' and the absolute avoidance of self-praise and of the puny affectation of 'directing the spheres' have delighted me so much (in contrast, between ourselves, with so much else) that I could not help saying it. Long may you live to do what you are doing, and avoid what you are avoiding, with undiminished success."

The value of such a tribute lies less in the fact that so good a journalist as Russell thought Spender a superlatively good journalist than in the reasons he gives for his judgement, for in two or three

dozen words he has indicated with marked exactitude the qualities which made Spender what he was and gave him the position he attained.

The further letters which follow, chosen almost at random, are from politicians, journalists, and journalists turned politicians.

(*From Lord Rosebery*)

Waterloo Day,
Durdans,
Epsom.

MY DEAR S.,

Though I almost always admire your articles I never intrude my admiration on you lest I become a bore. But I must break my rule with regard to your article of yesterday, which I read with nothing less than enthusiasm. Its grave indictment against the Government on the highest grounds and in the most judicial manner was admirable; and in such an article your cold-bloodedness enhances the effect. You can speak on that subject without bursting a blood-vessel. I doubt if I could.

Yours,
R.

(*From Mr. Bernard Shaw*)

10 Adelphi Terrace,
W.C.
24th November, 1907

DEAR SPENDER,

You have stampeded the entire left wing by that article on Old Age Pensions on Saturday. You had better take the reaction from a privileged lunatic like myself than from anybody else. And the protest had better be in the *Westminster*, as with all your absurdities you contrive to keep it the only paper that one can read with a sensation of being in decent company.

At the cost of knocking your make-up to pieces I plead for insertion to-morrow, my trivially personal reason being that I have been asked to meet Haldane and Asquith, and don't want to do it with such an article up my sleeve instead of on the table.

Yours ever,
BERNARD SHAW.

P.S. Confound you, you have cost me a broken Sabbath and a forfeited day's rest!

(*From Lord Fisher*)

6.2.09

DEAR SPENDER,

Forgive haste and pencil but I must send you one line of

admiration for your article in *Westminster* yesterday. They are a set of d—— idiots for not having taken your advice last August and I told them so *at the time*!

Ever yours,
J. A. FISHER.

(*From Lord Oxford*). 10 Downing Street,
Whitehall, S.W.
Private 11 March, 1910.

MY DEAR SPENDER,

There is more sound sense—not to speak of humour and other useful and agreeable accompaniments—in the first three columns of the *Westminster* to-day than I have come across for a long time.

Yours always,
H. H. ASQUITH.

(*From Lord Morley, after the second* 1910 *election*) Dec. 19th 1910
Flowermead,
Wimbledon Park, S.W.

MY DEAR SPENDER,

The strain on you must have been intense, and our debt to you can never be repaid. You and the P.M. have conducted the fight with unsurpassed dignity, strength, closeness and consistency.

Ever yours,
M.

(*From Mr. John Galsworthy*) Dec. 6th, 1915.
Wingstone,
Manaton,
Devon.

DEAR MR. SPENDER,

I don't know if you care for spasmodic tributes from casual persons; but I should like to express my gratitude to you for the consistency and calm reasonable courage of your expressed outlook throughout the War. Amongst all the alarums and excursions and unreasoning pessimism and foolish over-optimism it shines out; and deserves the thanks of us all.

Gratefully yours,
JOHN GALSWORTHY.

To these may be added a reminiscence contributed by Sir Robert

Edgcumbe (an assiduous and consistently unsuccessful Liberal candidate in the eighties and nineties of last century), who wrote: "I was travelling to London on a Thursday afternoon, 9th November, 1899, and was alone in my compartment. At Hatfield Lord Salisbury got into the same carriage, and as the train moved off he was handed three evening papers. Shortly after we started he took them up, opened first the *Globe* and immediately threw it upon the floor of the carriage; then he opened the *Evening Standard* and treated it in a similar manner; lastly he opened the *Westminster Gazette* and proceeded to read it diligently until we arrived at King's Cross station. He was on his way to London to speak that night at the Lord Mayor's banquet."

Such tributes lighten an editor's life, and serve as some set-off to the constant stream of criticism, instructed and otherwise, which (on the whole with salutary effect) flows into every newspaper-office in London. The letters quoted happen to be all from political friends; many quite as appreciative came from political opponents, though not, so far as the records show, from Front Bench men; and appreciations in writing of course were few compared with oral expressions of approval in the circles in which Spender habitually moved. They all conspired with other factors to make his *Westminster* days the happiest as well as the most effective of his life.

They were great days for any journalist, covering as they did the conflict in South Africa, sweeping social and political change at home and the greatest war the world had till then known. When Spender became editor at the beginning of 1896 the short-lived Gladstone-Rosebery administration had lately been defeated, and the Conservatives were back for another nine years of office. Before 1896 was over the Jameson Raid had laid the train for the coming war with the Boers; in 1898 the possibility of war with France was opened up by the appearance of Captain Marchand and his small force at Fashoda; in 1899 the Boer War began; in 1900 a khaki election renewed the Conservatives' mandate; in 1901 Queen Victoria died, and the country found itself under a King for the first time for more than sixty years; in 1903 Chamberlain smashed the Cabinet by launching his Tariff Reform campaign, which the *Westminster* worked so effectively to defeat; at the same time Balfour's Government was forcing through an Education Bill and a Licensing Bill in face of implacable Liberal opposition. In foreign politics Lord Lansdowne negotiated in 1904 an Anglo-French Entente, which Germany immediately proceeded to test by

the Kaiser's melodramatic descent on Tangier. Then a new chapter opened with the resignation of the Conservative Government in December 1905 and the unprecedented electoral triumph of the Liberals in January 1906.

This meant a new role for the *Westminster*, which, for the first time during Spender's editorship, became a Ministerial, instead of an Opposition, organ. That was not all gain. An incisive writer usually prefers the opportunities offered by attack to the difficulties frequently involved in defence. But Spender was more concerned with the constructive than the incisive, and he supported with zeal and conviction the great social programme—old age pensions, labour exchanges, health and unemployment insurance—which Liberal administrations carried into law between 1906 and 1911. He knew most of the Liberal Ministers well, and several—notably Edward Grey, John Morley and Asquith—intimately, and at every moment knew what was in the Government's mind, whether he was always able to approve its intentions or not. There were problems enough to occupy, and often perplex, leading journalists as well as leading politicians. Haldane was reforming the British Army; a succession of Education Ministers was sending up a succession of Education Bills to be destroyed by the alternative processes of rejection or mutilation by the House of Lords; Home Rule overshadowed everything, threatening unpredictable fissures, and ultimately civil war; Cabinet splits on naval construction—four Dreadnoughts or eight to be laid down in 1909?—developed almost to the point of crisis. In 1909 the Lords threw out the Budget. In 1910, which saw King George succeed King Edward, two elections and the threat of the creation of new peers (of whom Spender would have been one) were necessary to enable the Government to deprive the Lords of their destructive powers once for all. In 1911 the Germans sent the *Panther* to Agadir. In that year and 1912, internecine wars, localised though they actually were, in the Balkans threatened for a time to precipitate that European conflict which in the event was postponed for a bare two years longer.

The war of 1914-1918 brought political problems as well as military. On the question of Britain's duty at the moment when the vital decision had to be taken Spender never had a shadow of hesitation, though many members of the Cabinet had, and several resignations (of which only Morley's and Burns's materialised) were threatened. There survives a pencilled note from Bryce (then an Elder Statesman out of office) to Spender, dated 3 p.m. on

July 31st, asking his view on the desire of many Liberal M.P.'s to organise peace demonstrations with a view to keeping Britain out of the conflict. In the corner Spender has pencilled, "definitely answered No", and on the back, "Bryce seen later and strongly advised *not* to join this peace demonstration. He agreed that violation of Belgium would be *casus belli*".

All the war's vicissitudes were reflected at home. There was the alleged-shell-shortage campaign; there was the debateable Dardanelles strategy in 1915, and the formation of the first Coalition Government in the same year; there was the conscription controversy and the attempt to avert compulsion by the Derby scheme; there was the series of political manœuvres and intrigues leading up to the overthrow of Mr. Asquith by Mr. Lloyd George in December 1916—a machination regarding which Spender felt strongly, the more so since many of his personal friends were affected by it; there was the growing tension between the new Ministers and the generals in the field; there was the Maurice debate* in May 1918 and the excommunication by the Prime Minister of all Liberals who had voted against him on that occasion; there was the "coupon" election of December 1918; there was the Peace Conference with all its sequelae; there was the Washington Naval Disarmament Conference of 1921-22, which Spender attended, an arrangement which had the effect of taking him out of England at the moment when the evening *Westminster* expired and the morning *Westminster* was born.

Through all those fevered years the green *Westminster*, steered by a pilot clear of vision and firm of hand, kept its even course, for the most part supporting Liberal Ministers, always faithful to Liberal principles and fertile in political arguments on which Liberal speakers great and small drew gratefully and extensively. Spender's qualities as controversialist have often been characterised, generally in substantially the same terms. They have rarely been described better than in the *Manchester Guardian* in December 1916 in a note

*Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, who till recently had been Director of Military Operations at the War Office, in a letter to the Press challenged the accuracy of a statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, about the strength of the army in France. The Government proposed the appointment of a committee of two Judges to inquire into General Maurice's charges. Mr. Asquith, as Leader of the Opposition, gave reasons for preferring a Select Committee of the House of Commons, whereupon Mr. Lloyd George withdrew the offer of an inquiry altogether and insisted on an immediate vote of confidence; in the division, which followed purely party lines, 106 Liberals formed the minority.

on Spender's completion of twenty-one years of editorship. The *Westminster*, wrote its northern contemporary,

> "is the one journal in London which sells on its leader. It is unlike all other London leaders in that it is addressed to and read by the thoughtful section of the opposite party. Its tone is always grave, lucid and very persuasive. The duels between the *Morning Post* and the *Westminster Gazette*, fought out with Mr. Ian Colvin's lively invective and Mr. Spender's exasperating reasonableness not unsalted by wit, have been a recurring pleasure to Fleet Street. In the days of the Free Trade controversy, after Mr. Chamberlain or Mr. Bonar Law had made what seemed a damaging speech, it was to the *Westminster Gazette* among the London papers that people turned in the morning to get the straight and sound reply. His passion for seriously facing the arguments of his opponents and respectfully dealing with them was of high value to the Liberal Party, and his part in the conversion of London at the time of the great political landslide of 1906 must be ranked very high. There is no finer tradition in British journalism than that which he has so brilliantly maintained."

Aspects of that comment find a parallel in a *Punch* cartoon, depicting the Liberal newspaper-reader worked up to an uncontrollable agitation at his club as he scans first *The Times*, then the *Post*, then the *Telegraph*, with their scathing exposure of the iniquities of the Liberal Government, and then restored to unassailable and complacent serenity by the arrival of the *Westminster*, with its reasoned and convincing demonstration that all is and must be well under such Ministers, standing for such principles.

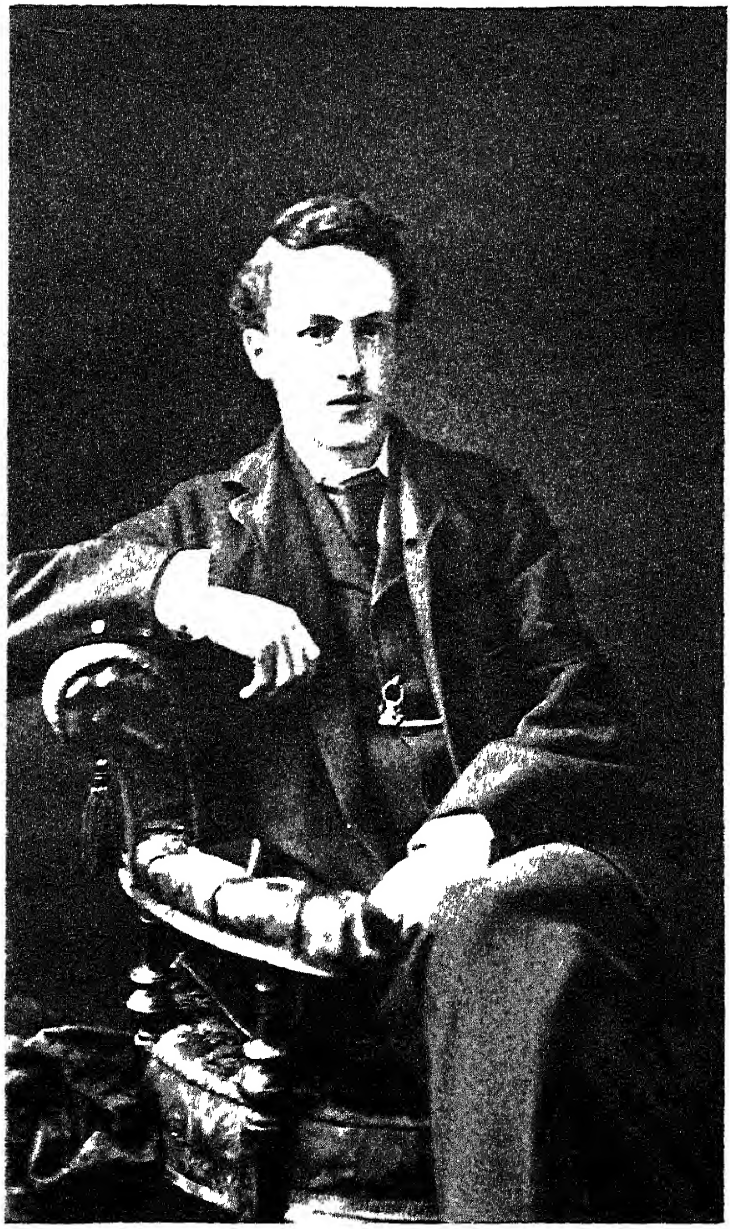
The "exasperating reasonableness not unsalted by wit" was administered to the public day by day through twenty-seven years—an achievement to which that perpetually maltreated word unique may for once properly be applied. For there is, so far as I know, no other case in English journalism in which a 1200-word leader has over a period so protracted been the regular handiwork of a single writer. I do not mean that the *Westminster* leader was never written by any other hand. Spender was, of course, away for some weeks every year on holiday. Even when he was at home Geake or Sir Alfred Watson occasionally took a hand. But that was essentially the exception. Readers of the *Westminster* assumed, as

they were entitled to assume, that the *Westminster* leader was Spender's leader, and five times out of six they were right.*

Spender was fortunate in possessing the knack of writion with facility. Where time is of no consequence the journalist who stops to polish his periods may do as good work as the naturally ready writer, and quite possibly better. But with a newspaper leader time is of the essence of the contract. Spender had necessarily his fixed time for his leader. Seventy-five minutes was allowed for it—and for an article of 1200 words, of the quality which his leaders regularly maintained, that was astonishingly rapid work. It must be remembered, moreover, that whereas a leader-writer who is that and nothing else may reasonably count on being left to his work undisturbed, an editor who writes his own leaders can never promise himself such immunity. Problems may arise in the office, an important piece of news may come in suddenly and its treatment have to be decided, some visitor too weighty or too potentially useful to be denied audience may present himself—all within the nominally sacred hour-and-a-quarter. Such things must be, and with it all the leader got written, thanks, Spender explains (for every writer has his idiosyncrasies), to a plentiful supply of very soft pencils and very rough copy-paper.

To write such leaders daily, supervise all sections of the paper as an editor must, and reserve time for making and maintaining essential personal contacts outside the office might seem sufficient daily work for most ordinary mortals. But it was far from being the whole of Spender's day's work. In 1927—and he continued to write voluminously down to his death in 1942—he computed that he had written about 11,000 leading articles, and that with special articles and book-reviews he had a weekly output of from 12,000 to 15,000 words for many years of his life. He spent on an average about four hours a day writing, and devoted the rest of an office-day of nine hours or more to editing and correspondence. He mentions, incidentally, that he always found it easier to write a *Westminster* article in the office than at home; I fancy most journalists, for no very obvious reason, feel the same. Why, it may be

*This deeply impressed George Moore, who wrote from the familiar Ebury Street address on April 16th of a year not stated: "One of the features of the *Westminster* that astonishes me almost daily is the leading article. Ross tells me that you write this article day by day, and ever since I think of the feat with increasing wonder, for a feat it is beyond all the feats I know of to write a column and a half of good sense in every kind of weather and every state of health and mind: the feat seems to me a super-human feat, and the part of the feat that surprises me most is the evenness of the writing."



Undergraduate

asked, did Spender add unnecessarily to his labours by writing special articles and reviewing books, in addition to his daily leader? The general answer, no doubt, is that he had something he wanted to say in special articles, and judgments he wanted to pass on certain books; there is no better reason for writing than that. Also he wanted many of the books for his library. But Spender is rather more specific in his reference to his labours. The leader was almost invariably political, and he considered it of the first importance (as it incontestably was) to turn his mind constantly to other fields. Reviewing in particular is a wholly different art from leader-writing, and every experienced journalist would unhesitatingly endorse Spender's conviction that "reviewing, contrary to the general belief, is one of the most difficult and exacting of all the tasks committed to the journalist, and is seldom done well except by those who have knowledge and experience".

From the danger of a surfeit of politics Spender found one escape in the distractions provided by the *Saturday Westminster*, a brilliant journalistic achievement to which, so far as I know, there has never been a precise parallel. Not the whole credit for a remarkable achievement belongs to Spender. He was, of course, editor-in-chief of everything that called itself *Westminster*, but the *Saturday Westminster* (at first the Saturday issue of the ordinary evening paper, but from 1912 a separate publication) was the peculiar charge of Miss Naomi Royde-Smith, the well-known novelist, who was from 1912 to 1922 its Literary Editor. The *Saturday Westminster* made a feature of book-reviews, and Spender wrote a great many of them, as well as contributing regularly a long article on the events of the week. But the paper's unique feature was its erudite competitions—high-brow in the last degree if ever anything was. The prizes were trifling—two guineas for each winner—and one competition was always for the best rendering of some passage of English poetry into Greek or Latin verse. It ran for something like twenty years, and university dons and public school masters entered by the hundred; one of the most frequent winners was Dr. F. W. Pember, the Warden of All Souls. Another still more eminent, and equally successful, competitor in another field was Lord Curzon; his forte, I believe, was producing flawless English versions of French poems. Spender would sometimes set a competition himself, but a task which demanded astonishing originality and resourcefulness was primarily in the hands of a practised trio, Miss Royde-Smith, the late Mr. H. F. Fox, of Brasenose, and the late Mr. Arthur Sidgwick. But whether contributor or spectator

Spender, as has been seen, found in the diversion of his thoughts from political polemics to reminiscences of the classics a welcome and valuable refreshment of spirit.

So, broadly and imperfectly, may the framework of Spender's professional career for the twenty-nine best years of his life be indicated. Many other varied activities fell within those *Westminster* years, but they may be more conveniently discussed under other headings. Whatever their importance and public interest, neither severally nor in the mass can they obscure the fact that the supreme achievement of a life far richer than most men's in achievement was direction of the *Westminster Gazette*. The value of that service to the world in general and to Liberalism in England in particular was admirably stated by Mr. Asquith when, at a dinner to Spender at the National Liberal Club on his retirement from the *Westminster* in March 1922, the ex-Premier gave it as his deliberate judgment that "No man in this country has done more effective service to Liberal principles than Mr. Spender, or done more to raise, refine and establish with legitimate authority in the councils of the nation and the world the profession to which he belongs. He is not one of those political controversialists who confuse noise with strength or claptrap with incisiveness. He has never shown—and what higher tribute could be paid to a journalist or to workaday politicians?—any deference to the passing idols and fashions of the hour, and has maintained throughout his career a high unbroken level of wisdom and consistency."

To that there is little to be added, and from it nothing to be subtracted.

Chapter IV

A JOURNALIST'S STANDARDS

Spender himself gives a partial answer to the question whether a journalist is born or made. "My mother," he says, "wrote; my father spent most of his spare time in writing; journalists and novelists were scattered all over the family. Not to feel the impulse was an abnormality, and my mother became anxious when it did not appear or was slow in appearing in any of our family." That explains a good deal, but not everything. It shows why Spender became a journalist, but not why he became the kind of journalist he was. The reason for that is to be found in his native qualities—which

his old headmaster, in the letter quoted in the last chapter, defined as integrity and sober judgment, adding to them very properly academic culture. If it be objected that the ideal journalist needs something more than this it must be admitted that he does. He needs that indescribable quality known as *flair*, of which Spender had his fair average share; and a brilliance of expression which not many journalists possess, and not many who do can keep under due control. Spender knew his limitations. "You and I have had a pretty good innings at the heart of things," he wrote to A. G. Gardiner in 1940, two years before his death, "and have not much to complain of on looking back. But you have added the touch of genius which I lack, and for lack of which I so often stumble and halt." The generosity of the tribute is characteristic, the self-depreciation goes beyond the mark. Spender did not stumble and halt; few men did that more seldom. He had not Gardiner's imaginative and vivid style, but he had his own, which served his particular purpose well. It was clear, easy, straightforward, admirably suited to the working of a mind that habitually reasoned to persuade. The "exasperating reasonableness" of a Spender clearly needed a different medium of expression from the copiousness of a Garvin or the colour of a Gardiner or the tempestuous onset of a Stead. Every man works out his own style unconsciously, and Spender's suited equally well the leaders of which he wrote so many, and the books, especially the biographies, to which he devoted his later years.

The fact that he was persuasive did not mean for a moment that he failed to be critical where criticism was needed; his leaders during Chamberlain's Protection campaign are evidence enough of that. He could be fearlessly and destructively critical when he chose, but he knew how to make his execution more effective by reserving his fire. "It is a rule of journalism," he wrote somewhere in *The Changing East*, "that if you shoot at everything you bring nothing down," and he would have cordially endorsed (possibly enough he did in fact endorse) a reference Lord Rosebery once made to "those who are always critics and always objectors—and nothing in this world was ever done by critics and objectors". His criticism in most cases was as reasoned as his persuasion was, and there were those no doubt who thought that in consequence it lost something of its edge. But he was fully capable of cut-and-thrust on occasion, as reference to one or two of his leaders on Northcliffe in 1916* shows plainly enough. But on the whole he believed more in restraint.

Apart from any natural limitations, which were few, Spender

*See page 142

deliberately imposed on himself others. In his writing he set himself to acquire certain habits which grew into recognised rules—recognised for himself alone but well worthy of consideration by any aspiring journalist, professional or amateur. "One was," he says, "to make my language more moderate when my views were most extreme. Follow this and you may earn a reputation for sobriety and moderation while steadily expounding the most subversive views." That reputation Spender certainly did earn (though his views could rarely be described as subversive), but it is not moderation of language that wins readers for most papers to-day, and while Spender fit audience found, it was undeniably "though few," and the fewness ultimately brought the *Westminster* to its end. That is not to say for a moment that the moderation was mistaken. It was immensely effective, and it made the *Westminster*, if readers were weighed instead of counted, one of the most influential organs of the day in any country. Those, moreover, who would judge Spender by the criteria of modern journalism must recognise that they were criteria which he never did and never would accept. He saw nothing but evil in the passion for vast circulations, built up on a fixed resolve to give the public lavishly whatever the public wanted. "I am in my bones the old Victorian anonymous journalist," he wrote in the Journal of the Institute of Journalists in 1940, the year in which he held the high office of Charter President of the Institute,* "and I never see the veil torn off, and my name placed at the head of an article, without a slight sense of impropriety"; and in an address to the Institute in the same year he gave expression to a highly heterodox view by declaring that "in his Utopia there would be a law preventing newspapers from having a circulation of more than a hundred thousand. This would ensure the existence of about eighty London newspapers, where there were now only about ten, and eighty whole-time newspaper staffs. This would give the reader a great variety of choice and ensure the journalist the opportunities and the security that were now denied to him". This, however, he recognised was past praying for, and in the world as it was things must be accepted as they were.

What more than anything else gave the *Westminster* and Spender himself their remarkable influence, and won for both so general and profound respect, was the Editor's unswerving journalistic integrity.

*i.e. President in the year, 1940, in which the fiftieth anniversary of the grant of the Institute's charter was celebrated. Spender had been an active member of the Institute since his Hull days, when he was chairman of the local branch.

Fleet Street is not the most congenial of settings for a man who would keep his soul unstained, but no man ever passed through Fleet Street who did more than Spender to guard the honour and maintain the standards of a great profession. If he erred at all it was in an excess, not an insufficiency, of conscientiousness—and if that be a fault it is one so rare that it takes rank among the virtues. That Spender honoured every confidence ever reposed in him by his political friends goes without saying, and in those doubtful cases in which information is imparted without express embargo (sometimes in the secret hope of unauthorised publication) he could be relied on to prefer silence. But he went much further than that—further, indeed, than many journalists of equal integrity would feel it necessary to go. If a piece of news which he had received confidentially came into the office independently by some quite different channel he would still veto its publication till it became everybody's property. "Over and over again," he writes, "I had to put my veto on the publication of news which I knew to be true, but which I was under an honourable obligation not to publish." This raises a nice point of journalistic ethics, but no one certainly will think the less of Spender for showing himself a purist. Refusal to publish something on the ground that its publication is not in the public interest is another matter. In that sphere Spender once had a critical decision to take. The famous interview with the Kaiser, whose publication in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1908 created such a sensation, was offered first in skeleton form to the *Westminster*. Spender took the view that while publication of the interview (which had been concocted in the Wilhelmstrasse) in any paper would be undesirable it would be doubly so if the paper was one which, like the *Westminster*, was the strongest supporter of the Government of the day, and was assumed, however groundlessly, to stand in close relations with the Foreign Office and Sir Edward Grey. So the *Telegraph* secured the *réclame* which the *Westminster* might have enjoyed.*

*On July 6th, 1930, Spender wrote to his wife: "Burnham has an article in to-day's *Telegraph* revealing the facts about the notorious Kaiser interview of 1908. In it he says calmly that the general opinion at the time was that *I* was the author! Fancy it's being supposed that I, who was then editing the W.G., wrote this interview and got it published in the *Telegraph*. It is true, however, that the material for the interview was put into my hands (some months before it reached the *Telegraph*) by Metternich or Kuhlmann, who asked me to say whether I thought its publication would help British-German relations. Of course I said unhesitatingly no, for it would evidently be one of the most mischievous things possible, as indeed it turned out to be. I propose to say this, though all the modern journalist stunters will call me a prize idiot for having missed such a scoop."

On scrupulous fairness and independence, uninfluenced by personal friendships, personal antagonisms, personal aspirations or personal distinctions, Spender was adamant. I may perhaps illustrate his austerity by quoting his verdict when I sought his advice on a small matter that concerned myself. Some ten or twelve years after the end of the first German War I was approached by the representative of a European Government and asked whether I would visit a disputed frontier in which the country in question was interested, study the subject and write a book about it. I explained as courteously as I could that substantial expenses would be involved, that such a book would not be a commercial proposition, and that it was clearly impossible for me to undertake the commission at the cost of an interested party, even on the understanding that I was free to write what I liked. I thought, however, that there might be a middle course, and it was on this that I consulted Spender. Suppose, I said, the Government in question approached some London publisher of standing, asking him to arrange for the production of a book on the frontier question and suggesting me as a suitable author—if all my dealings were with him and I had an entirely free hand, was that a proposition that should be accepted? Spender was clear that it was not. "If you didn't know," he said, "that an interested Government was behind the proposal it would be all right. But as you do know you can't do it." No doubt he was right. At any rate, having asked for his advice I took it, and the literature of frontier-problems in Europe is the poorer by one volume.

One of the most debatable questions for journalists of Spender's calibre is the acceptance of honours, and it is not surprising that on that his ideas were clear-cut. It need not be added that his actions were in accordance with his views. He was three times offered a knighthood or something higher (in 1906, in 1916 and during Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's premiership in 1934),* and in each case declined.

* The letters which passed in this case, creditable as they are to both writers, should be quoted.

10 Downing Street
Whitehall.

Personal and Private. 3rd December 1934.

MY DEAR SPENDER

I am now going through the lists in connection with the New Year Honours. You know how delighted I should be if you would let me consider you for a knighthood. Would you send me a note of what you feel? It would be in recognition of all you have done in public and non-party life, and your name would therefore not be on a political list.

With kindest regards,

J. A. Spender Esq. J. RAMSAY MACDONALD.

The Companionship of Honour which he did accept in 1937 is something of a different order. It does not carry a title; in Spender's case it was offered by the head of a Government to which he was politically opposed; and it came fifteen years after he had ceased to be an editor and when he had attained distinction in the field of authorship. On such honours as commonly fall to journalists his general view was that "in the peculiar relations in which he stands to the Government the working political journalist [the limitation to *political* journalists should perhaps be noted] does better not to put himself in a position in which he seems either to be receiving a reward for past 'services' or to be placing himself under an obligation to render future ones. . . This view was, I think, justified in a practical way during the subsequent years, when I was able to keep up a steady protest in the *Westminster* against the abuse of the honours system without being exposed to the retort which must have followed if I too had figured in the lists of this period."

If further evidence of Spender's attitude on the honours question be desired it may be found in a letter to him from Mr. Asquith in November 1909. "There is nothing," wrote the Prime Minister, "which gives me so much trouble (or, I may add such profound

Well Hill House
Chelsfield
Dec. 6th 1934.

DEAR PRIME MINISTER

I am very grateful to you for your kind thought and greatly appreciate the compliment you pay me. My very warm thanks for that. But I have always held the view, and have acted upon it so far as I myself am concerned, that writers, and especially writers on public affairs, had better stand aloof from what are commonly called 'honours'. It is a pleasure to me to remember that I have had very kind offers of this kind from now three Prime Ministers, but having gone thus far I think I will go on as I am to the end, and ask you kindly not to submit my name.

I am sure you will understand this, and not think I am passing any judgement on others who think differently, and still less that I undervalue the honour which you do me.

With kindest regards,
Yours very sincerely,
J. A. SPENDER.

In a private letter Spender wrote, on Dec. 9th, 1934: "It may amuse you to hear that the P.M. has offered me a knighthood—declined with thanks. . . . My record on the subject of honours is now a pretty good one. C.B. offered me a knighthood in 1906, Asquith a baronetcy in 1916, and now Ramsay MacDonald a knighthood in 1934. The P.M. writes that he thinks me right in declining, and himself right in making the offer. But I seem to have gone down a little in the scale since 1916."

disgust) as the allocation of honours . . . I am disposed to agree with you that it would be better that journalists should neither seek nor accept such distinctions; but that, unfortunately, is not the way of the world in which we live. The voracity for such things is so widespread and so shameless as to be incredible to anyone who has not seen it at first hand." A passage of some interest omitted from this letter, deals with a particular newspaper honour regarding which it would be improper to say anything here. Spender, it should be added, had no feelings against honours for other people. It was at his instance that W. S. Gilbert, the dramatist, was given a knighthood in 1907.

Altogether it would be true to say that the outstanding characteristic of Spender as a journalist was his sense of responsibility. That, in one aspect, is something of a disability. To tone down an exhilaratingly aggressive article because it is unfair at this point or disingenuous at that, or because, however fair and however true, it lends itself to misinterpretation abroad, is a sacrifice never to be made willingly. But Spender felt no doubt about making it, even though he knew his article suffered in consequence.

> "You accurately define the dilemma of the writing man;" he wrote to A. G. Gardiner in 1940, "either he gets filled up with the idea of his own perfection and infallibility, or he is haunted with doubts which often make his life a burden to him. X and Y are fair examples of the first kind, you and I more or less of the second. I have just sent off my article to the *Sunday Times* and am now not at all certain whether I shan't be relieved if it fails to get there, and doesn't appear."

Something here may be ascribed to a sick man's questionings and misgivings, but long before this Spender had dwelt on the restraint which any writer on foreign affairs, particularly in times at all critical, must observe.

> "He is addressing," he pointed out, "two or more audiences which may draw widely different conclusions from the same argument, and some of these conclusions may be entirely different from what he intends. He may sit in a London newspaper office and write an article attacking his own Government, and the next day see the whole of it reprinted in a foreign newspaper and used for the quite different purpose of stiffening a foreign Government which is in controversy with his own. A pacifist, for

example, may criticise his own Government for its alleged imperialist or militarist tendencies, and see his argument seized by the militarists of another country and used as an incitement to their Government to increase its armaments. The solution of this problem requires a combination of skill and wisdom which cannot always be reckoned upon in journalists more than in other human beings."

That is true enough; most journalists in the years just before and after Spender's death had always to be conscious of the danger of "playing into Goebbels's hands". All that is possible in such cases is to cultivate what skill, and draw on what wisdom, can be commanded. That was Spender's resource, and he possessed both skill and wisdom beyond ordinary measure.

But if consciousness of responsibility served as a check on coruscation (not that Spender was ever tempted in that direction) it secured for the writer practising such restraint a growing and widening respect in political circles, and accounted for the various invitations to Spender to serve on public bodies, from the railway committee appointed by Mr. Lloyd George as President of the Board of Trade in 1907 to the Royal Commission on the Private Manufacture of Armaments in 1935. Two curiously contrasting views of the suitability of the journalist for such work reached him at different times. One was from John Morley, who was capable of being singularly grudging and jealous where men of his own profession were concerned. Spender mentions that once or twice during his *Westminster* career he was spoken of for certain administrative posts (which he had not sought and would not have accepted) and found that Morley strongly discountenanced the suggestion, not—Spender adds generously,—out of personal unfriendliness, but "on the general ground that it was improper to promote journalists to these positions, and that their training and habit of mind rendered them unfit for dealing with important affairs in an impartial spirit". In view of Morley's own career, with its swift transition from journalism to high Ministerial office, Spender's comment, "he did not apply the maxim to himself" does not suffer from excess of emphasis. In striking and welcome contrast, is a letter Spender received from Lord Fitzmaurice in 1919. "I see a statement in the *Daily News*," the former Chancellor of the Duchy wrote, "which I hope you will be able to confirm, that you are going to Egypt as one of an important mission [the Milner Mission] in which case please accept my most sincere congratulations on public as well as on private grounds. It is a

tardy recognition by our prejudiced rulers that a journalist can be a practical politician and statesman. In no other country is it questioned. But we are still a nation of Philistines." Between these two estimates of journalists and their capacities choice is free.

Two examples of Spender's jealousy for the observance of journalistic proprieties may be recorded here. His relations with his proprietors, from Newnes's day to Cowdray's, were uniformly happy, but one rather unusual difference of opinion arose, and it is instructive to observe Spender's handing of it. In 1909 Sir Alfred Mond (subsequently Lord Melchett) was chairman of the *Westminster* Board. A letter to him from Spender in August of that year tells its own story:

45 Sloane Street,
S.W.
Aug. 6th, 1909.

MY DEAR MOND,

You may remember that you had a signed letter on two consecutive days in the *W.G.* last week. The result of that was to bring me a very strong remonstrance from other proprietors of the paper, and I find there is a very general feeling among them that signed communications from proprietors should be a very rare incident in the *W.G.*

My first impulse was to say that the Board should relieve me from embarrassment in a matter of this kind by framing a rule for themselves, but on second thoughts I think I had better tell you frankly how the matter looks to me. It is almost an absolute rule among proprietors of newspapers not to write over their own names in their own newspapers. Experience shows that it does the proprietor no good, for the public invariably discounts what he writes, and does the public harm, since this curious British public seems to have a rooted objection to any newspaper influence which it conceives as personal. If I were to sign my name to the leading article I should probably be chased out of the country at the end of a year, not because the articles would be worse or different, but because the air of personal exhortation would be resented. I have watched it for many years, and I know what an impalpable indefinite thing—a sort of vague personal summary of its whole record—the influence of a newspaper is, and how easily it is lost if the reader gets it into his head that any one person, whether proprietor, editor or writer, is wielding it.

I am sure you won't take any of these observations as meant in

any personal sense to yourself, for I know how scrupulously you and the other directors guard the independence of the paper. But you, as Chairman, cannot write frequently over your own name without producing the impression that the paper is your organ, and that will be resented by the other proprietors and destroy the particular reputation which the *Westminster* has of being no one's organ.

I feel I know you well enough to write thus frankly without fear of misunderstanding, and I am sure you will do anything you can to prevent me from being placed in a difficult position between you and the other proprietors.

Yours ever,

J. A. SPENDER.

There are passages here which should find a place in any manual of journalistic principle and practice.

The second case was different, and also unusual. During the last war Spender was corresponding with a titled person of no excessive importance on the subject of compulstory military service, and the latter asked what line the *Westminster* would be taking regarding it. This does not on the face of it seem a very heinous violation of the decencies, but Spender reacted to it with vigour.

"MY DEAR——", he wrote,

"You must allow me to say that you are exceeding your province when you cross-question me as to what I may or may not do, or what line of comment I may or may not take, in the *Westminster Gazette*. That is my affair, and I should not have corresponded with you if I had known that your object was to get from me some answer on that subject that you and your friends want. I imagined myself to be writing to you in a friendly way about the merits of the question, and not to 'serve a purpose' which you 'have in hand' and about which I know nothing. I am sorry I misunderstood the situation, but I must ask you to be good enough not to make any further use of my letters.

Yours truly,

J. A. SPENDER."

There was, of course, rather more involved than this single letter would indicate. It was as a member of the London County Territorial Association and chairman of its recruiting committee that Spender had engaged in a short private correspondence on con-

scription, and he was no doubt right to draw some distinction between what he wrote and said as an individual and what he wrote and said as Editor of the *Westminster*. But the subject under discussion was of the first public importance, and it need not be considered flagrantly illegitimate for a man writing to the Editor of the *Westminster* to inquire what line the *Westminster* was likely to take regarding it.

CHAPTER V

THE MAN

MUCH has been said, and more will be, in these pages about Spender the craftsman. It is in some respects less easy, though in no way less necessary, to write of Spender the man. No one can doubt that he was a great journalist. No one who knew him can doubt that he was a great man. To demonstrate that at length, on the testimony, written and oral, of his contemporaries, would not be difficult, but I take leave simply to state it dogmatically. It is enough that he mingled on terms of complete and unquestioned equality with men like Asquith and Grey, Haldane and Morley and Bryce. Whatever their stature, his was the same. Lord Knutsford (of London Hospital fame) wrote in 1927, in connection with Spender's *Life, Journalism and Politics*:

> "Without flattery, I *believe* that you have done more for your country than any man living. They have had their splashes, sometimes up, sometimes down, stimulated by the excitement of politics and ambition. You have just gone on quietly saying what you thought right, without any consideration as to how it would affect you. . . . No one gets all, or half, what they want done, but you have helped to make people think right, and you could never have done that if you had been a violent partisan. That temper of yours is the greatest asset you have. Anybody can keep their temper if he is a 'Don't care', but you are not that and never have been, and yet when things were going wrong you kept your temper and remained on an even keel however bitter the disappointment."

Put that a little lower, as perhaps it should be, it is still put very high.

It is never very satisfying to analyse a human being into his qualities, for in fact he is not an amalgam of qualities, but a whole. But if some attempt is to be made to show what it was that made Spender a great journalist and a great man it would be true to say at least this—that conspicuous in the constituents of the man as we knew him were integrity, innate courtesy and kindliness, wide learning and the culture that comes of it, a dignified and impressive presence and an undeviating obedience to the dictates of chivalry and honour. That is my own estimate. Let me add to it a passage from a letter to me regarding this book by one of Spender's most intimate friends:

> "You will find the thought of his *sagacity* continually occurring to you. Ask yourself what made up or contributed to this sagacity. The judicial temper; ability to see all round a subject; vast stores of knowledge carefully collected; a very good memory; unflagging industry; a pleasing demeanour; firmly rooted principles; indifference to personal kudos."

All that is true. That was Spender the man, and Spender the man with a pen (or more often a pencil) in his hand was Spender the journalist. For there were not different standards for private and professional life.

Of the private life something more needs to be said, for it was by the nature of things little known to the world. In its most intimate aspect it concerned two people only, for fortune did not send the Spenders children. Of what that marriage relationship meant to Spender his letters tell impressively and movingly. In his home was everything he cared for on earth. The home moved from time to time, as homes do. When Alfred Spender and May Rawlinson married in 1892, he then twenty-eight, she five years younger, they settled at Cheyne Walk, Chelsea—No. 29—and lived there eleven years. Then came a migration northward to a flat at 45 Sloane Street, where some seventeen years were spent—more than at any other home before or after. That was the end of town life. Spender was a lover of the country, of birds and flowers and trees, and in the country he spent all his days from 1918 onwards. Kent was the chosen county, and the first experience of it was at the White House, Cobham (to be distinguished, of course, from the better-known Surrey Cobham). After that came the house where the happiest days

of his life and Mrs. Spender's were passed, Chantry Place, Marden,* with its old timbered room in an unrestored wing, its gardens, its ponds and its wood. Soon after they moved there the evening *Westminster* came to an end and Spender was able to stay in the country three or four days in the week. They spent fifteen years at Marden, from 1918 to 1933, and among other activities built there a hospital for hop-pickers—continuing on a smaller scale the devoted and invaluable work Mrs. Spender had carried on during the last war in the war-hospital she organised at Tankerton, near Whitstable. After Marden came a move (for financial reasons) to Chelsfield, and then, Chelsfield proving too cold, to Warren End, Farnborough—the Kent Farnborough. That, with one exception, was the last settled home, for in the summer of 1940, when at one and the same time Spender's health began to give way and the war to create almost insuperable domestic difficulties, rooms were taken at Crowborough, first at the Crest Hotel and then for a short time in a private house. But travel restrictions made even Sussex remote, and early in 1942 Mrs. Spender found a flat, small but most comfortable and convenient, at Bromley, which was accessible enough from London for visits from close friends to be possible. There Spender had for a few months—less than three—the satisfaction of feeling that he was under a roof of his own once more, and there, in June 1942, he died.

Such is the brief epitome of two people's married life. It has its place in the record, but it tells little about them. And there is much to be told about aspects of Spender not so far touched on in these pages. More, for example, if he is to be seen as he was, must be said of his love of his gardens, the garden at Marden in particular. His letters are full of the garden, and the birds and flowers in it. For example:

*In 1941 in a letter to a friend Spender said something of Marden. "Our real homes," he wrote, "were in Sloane Street, where we lived for seventeen years and only left when the rent was going to be doubled, and at Marden in the Weald of Kent, where we had a garden of eight acres, and a big meadow on which we built the Hop-pickers' Hospital and the children's clinic. The garden had a wood and two ponds in it, a wonderful old fruit-wall and many (too many) glass-houses. It was altogether charming, and when we bought it we thought we had made a neat division of what we possessed, so much to spend, so much to save and enough for old age. But investments went wrong, expenses increased, and after fourteen years we decided very sorrowfully that we must sell it and draw in our horns. Yet I don't at all regret it on looking back. We revelled in the garden and house—travelled half round the world, carriage paid by books and articles, and I had to work pretty hard to keep things going when I might otherwise have been an idler."

"Everything is beautiful here, and I can't bear your being away on by far the most beautiful days we have had since we came. We are smothered in blossom and the limes have come with a burst. Birds deafening, and I think more than last year.."

"Nothing has happened except that the parrot and I have had some outings in the garden with the dog, who tries his utmost to be friendly to both of us, but is repulsed by the parrot, who is violently jealous and talks his strange agitated jargon all the time. The robin actually perched on the parrot's cage when he was out, and he said nothing and looked quite benevolent."

"This morning the three ducks came waddling up the garden and established themselves in the upper pond (opposite the kitchen), which they must have scented from afar. This is all right, for it is beginning to scum, but we shall have somehow to get them back after this holiday."

But Spender's love of flowers and gardens was not confined to Marden, or England. It reveals itself sooner or later on every journey. In America the absence of both (except in California) continually perplexes and disappoints him. In writing of the Delhi Durbar he emphasises approvingly the efforts made, and made successfully, to improvise gardens in the great city of tents. At El Obeid, in the southernmost province of the Sudan, he lists industriously all the varieties of flowers he finds in bloom in the gardens round every bungalow, and so again the wild flowers on the slopes round Nazareth or on the clustering Bermuda islands. But to him, like Kipling, the "English posies" came before any of the rest.

Love of Nature was one of the bonds between Spender and Grey. Two extracts from letters from Fallodon—one describing Fallodon with Grey, one Fallodon without him—show how much the two men had in common besides politics:

"There is the loveliest old garden here, and two big ponds with the most enchanting wildfowl, all of them quite tame and feeding out of your hand. We fed them punctually at half-past five and found the whole company assembled and waiting for us—teals, eider-ducks, Carolina ducks got up like harlequins and dozens of queer birds, mainly South American. Everything is tame here; the squirrels come in at the windows and feed from basins of nuts

put in the rooms. At each section of the garden a robin presents himself, ready to feed out of your hand. The speciality of the kitchen-garden is a blackberry as big as a mulberry, *not* a loganberry but a pure blackberry and a most delicious fruit to *eat* as well as cook. It is called the Himalayan blackberry. We must get some."

"Grey has gone to London and I am here alone. It is at last a beautiful day and the sea is as blue as the Mediterranean. The robins follow me about the garden and expect me to feed them, but I was not given any of the special kinds of worms on which they are fed, and it would be against all the rules to offer them anything else. Every living thing here has its own special food, and Grey mixes the meal for the eider duck with his own hand. He has a friend living in the keeper's lodge in the park whose business in life is to feed them all when he is away. The park and garden are delightful; outside on one side are three miles of flat meadowland to the sea, and on the other rising country towards the moors."

Even so, Spender would never have exchanged Marden for Fallodon.

Apart from his literary work Spender had not a great deal to distract him from his garden. The heterogeneous great enshrined in the pages of *Who's Who* are invited (for some reason) to state what their recreations are. Spender left that space blank. He had in fact few organised recreations. He did not play golf. He rarely went to the theatre. He did not drive a car. There was, undisguisedly, a financial aspect in all this. The serious journalist can only look for strictly limited rewards (Lord Northcliffe would unquestionably have been glad to pay Spender double or treble what he was earning on the *Westminster*) and both Spender and his wife were quite determined that what they could afford to spend on pleasures should be spent on travel. Apart from occasional long journeys—to Egypt, to India, to Palestine, to the West Indies—they went almost every year to the South of France, usually to Monte Carlo, attracted to that famed resort by the facilities offered for getting away from it—up into the mountains at whose foot it lies. Regularly every day they would catch a ten o'clock train up, and walk for hours among hills and valleys, taking food with them or trusting to what some wayside estaminet might provide. Spender had always been an active walker. Though he had one or two severe illnesses in the course of his life, he

was of a robust constitution. Something has been said already of his achievements in boyhood on an old high bicycle. Some notes on a day he spent with Sir Edward Grey when he was nearing sixty-two show that vigour had not yet deserted him.

"We had as good a journey," he wrote in October 1924, "as getting out at Newcastle at 5 a.m. makes possible, and after it a strenuous day—work till 12, then on bicycles to Bamburgh and a long circuit back (about 28 miles altogether), then an hour before dinner and two hours in the evening at the MS. [of Grey's *Twenty-Five Years*]. Grey is extraordinarily tough, and I not much behind him. Our bicycling pace was really quite creditable."

Without being conspicuously athletic Spender played various games in his younger days. At Oxford he played rugby for his college, and he mentions among the attractions of Hull during his *Eastern Morning News* period that there was always plenty of cricket and tennis. He was a strong swimmer, and on visits to Etretat with Ernest and Reginald McKenna there was a kind of tacit dispensation in favour of the reckless Englishmen when the sea was officially pronounced too rough for ordinary bathers. In cricket Spender always took a lively interest. His home at Bath was in W. G. Grace's county, and his school days were the days of Grace's glory. One story about the great man I have heard Spender tell more than once. At some friendly match Grace came up to a young player on the opposite side to his own and asked him how he was feeling. "Not too happy about your lobs," was the answer. "Oh, nonsense," said W.G. "They're quite easy to play really. Come along to the nets and I'll give you some practice." Spender's friends were never quite sure whether he himself was the young player or not. In later years he had a little net-practice when he went to stay with C. B. Fry on his training ship *Mercury*, on the Hamble, and in *Westminster* days he not infrequently managed an afternoon, at the Oval or (less often) Lords, while he loyally gave his own county moral support at Maidstone or Canterbury. One of the filched afternoons on a date only to be determined by internal evidence is thus described:

"I have yielded to temptation, and instead of working this afternoon been up to Lords to see Gentlemen *v.* Players. Maclean [Sir Donald] was the tempter. I was to have lunched with him at the House, but he said instead come and lunch at Lords, and

being there I stayed all the afternoon in Ranjitsinghi's box, whither I was taken by the Frys. . . . The Jam Sahib was very affable, and we were surrounded by cricketers, who talked shop and were highly critical of the performance."

With all the recognition due to Spender as journalist and politician it must never be forgotten that he was a very considerable scholar. It is true that he missed his first in Greats, but that was the result largely of ill-health during the examination, and his contemporaries were unanimous in regarding him as of the class of firsts. He did not, moreover, leave his classics behind him when he came down from Oxford. They were part of his environment all his life, which explains incidentally why he took so deep a personal interest in the remarkable Greek and Latin verse competitions which for years formed a unique feature of the *Saturday Westminster*. He was steeped in Plato and Aristotle—particularly Plato. When he addressed the annual conference of the National Union of Teachers in 1934 he took as text a long passage, twenty lines or so, of Juvenal. He knew his Homer and Virgil, his Thucydides and Livy. Not, of course, that he would have admitted that that argued scholarship. Two or three years before his death a friend who was writing to him put him in the same class with Gilbert Murray. He repelled the suggestion with energy, almost with vehemence. "If," he wrote, "I have led people to think that I am 'learned', or to be compared in that respect with Gilbert Murray, then I am a dreadful impostor. I am just a vagrant reader picking bits out of books and storing them up for use in my day's work, which is that of the journeyman journalist who occasionally strings them together in a sort of commonplace book, or uses them in an attempt to write history journalist-fashion, i.e. to set down things within his knowledge, as they seemed to him to happen. Compare this with Murray's profound knowledge of Greek or any really learned historian's knowledge of his period. Can it be that a rather glib but patchy memory has led me to fob this off as learning?" All that, no doubt, is true, and if the comparison is to be with Dr. Murray on the particular territory within which he is supreme in this country and far beyond, then it is admittedly fantastic. But something must be credited for range of learning as well as depth, and in some of Spender's books—two in particular—the range of learning is wide. No one can scan the chapter-headings of his *Government of Mankind*, with their discussions of the doctrines of Socrates, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Charlemagne, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau and

Montesquieu and many others, without realising that here is at least very extensive historical scholarship, and study of the book leaves no room for any suggestion that range has been compensated for by lack of depth. Take again his *Fifty Years of Europe*. There was probably one other man in England who could have written it, but I can think of only one. The writing of contemporary history does not permit of the dispassionate assessments based on the distant view, but a work demanding intensive study of documents, strict accuracy and clarity in presentation and a scrupulous sincerity and justice in comment is a work which needs a scholar to produce it and whose production in itself argues scholarship. And after all, if contemporary history is to be belittled, we must write off the author of *The Peloponnesian War*. It is not to be suggested that Spender would be thought of first as a scholar. He was thought of first as a great journalist. But he was certainly the most scholarly journalist of his day, and though his scholarship was never obtruded it was clearly one of the ingredients of his journalistic success.

What bearing his scholarship had on his views on poetry I will not attempt to determine. But they were decided views. Modern poetry he could not away with, even when, through the pen of his nephew Stephen, it became in some sense a family product. "I speak as an impenitent traditionalist," he wrote in an open letter to that nephew in *Horizon* in 1940, and with the warning that "Left-wing poetry, Marxist poetry, is on a par with Nazi poetry, Nazi science, Nazi art," he coupled some reminiscences of the poets of his own youth. "When I began to read poetry, in the 'seventies and 'eighties," he observed, "there was an established body of poets, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, Matthew Arnold, and others not quite in the same rank, as William Morris, Coventry Patmore, Rossetti, Meredith, and later Robert Bridges, who between them had a profound influence on reasonably educated people, and filtered through these to all classes." But poetry now? It all seemed to fade out as far as ordinary folk, unequal to the esoteric and the eclectic, were concerned.

Spender developed his views a little in a letter to A. G. Gardiner in the same year.

> "About the modernists, the young 'uns will follow the young fashions, and nothing that we can say will move them. I have spent a great deal of time in puzzling out Eliot's poems, and have tried to deal fairly with them in two chapters in my last book. But the fact that they have to be puzzled out, and in a

manner quite unlike the puzzling out say of Browning or obscure Greek poets, kills them as poetry for me. Eliot, on his own showing, requires the reading of a whole reference library for the understanding of his 'Waste Land'. I say to him, this may be a curious and interesting new literary product, but there is no definition of poetry to which it corresponds."

Such an estimate of modern poetry can of course be rejected or endorsed. Here it is cited simply as Spender's view, good or bad, right or wrong. "An impenitent traditionalist", he had set his standards by the great poets of the past. Measured by that yardstick he did not find the poets of the present great.

Of two attainments of Spender's youth, music and painting, he abandoned one and kept up the other. To play the violin as he wanted to play it demanded constant practice, and in his crowded life he had no time for that. So with firm resolution fiddle and bow were laid by. But palette and paint-box were not. Here again for the greater part of the year time was lacking for the execution of those water-colour sketches in which Spender revealed his proficiency, but every holiday was a sketching holiday, and portfolios were crowded with his impressions of Riviera, or Italian, or Egyptian or Indian scenes. He did not often exhibit, but in 1918 a London gallery had the idea of running a show of author-artists' pictures, and Spender was invited to send a selection of his own, together with Chesterton, Belloc, Laurence Housman, Maurice Baring, Arnold Bennett and others. A critique in the defunct *Morning Post*, sub-headed "Mr. Spender and his Vocation", remarks that "J. A. Spender's political opponents who look at his drawings of 'Monte Carlo', 'Where the Hindenburg Line Begins' and 'Spring' may suggest without malice that he has mistaken his vocation, and should give up editing the *Westminster* for art." It adds that "Mr. Spender is gifted with a real instinct for landscape in water-colour. Note the subtle treatment of the olive trees (52), which seem to rise above the hill-side like incense." One of the pictures, "Where the Hindenburg Line Ends", was greatly admired by Countess Benckendorff, wife of the former Russian Ambassador, who was anxious to buy it because it depicted the spot where her son had been killed. Spender would not sell it, but gave it to her immediately.

Having neither the knowledge of Spender's pictures nor the knowledge of art to enable me to estimate his abilities in this sphere adequately, I have sought the judgment of Mr. Clive Gardiner,

who is fully qualified in both respects, and am indebted to him for this comment:

"Early in 1839 I was painting Spender's portrait in his house near Farnborough. The sittings were to me most enjoyable; Spender kept the pose well and apparently without difficulty, talking all the time on a multitude of subjects—politics, history, music, poetry, painting. He spoke of painting with a peculiar insight, and discussed technical details with a familiarity which surprised me, until I realised that he was himself an enthusiastic painter in water-colours. One morning, when the sitting was over, he showed me, with a charming mixture of diffidence and satisfaction, some of his pictures, sketches he had made both at home and on his travels abroad. They served as records, he explained, of places which he and Mrs. Spender had visited together and liked to remember. They were admirably done. Choice of subject, handling of the colour-washes, sense of tone and placing on the paper, were alike excellent. Only occasionally did he attempt the impossible, a mistake so often made by the amateur. When I singled out one of the sketches which gave me special pleasure (a group of poplars seen in a silvery light and expressed with great tenderness) he again questioned me eagerly on some technical point which had interested him at the time: 'Was it possible, in such a delicate medium, to get the light full on the trees and at the same time make them look solid?' He became absorbed in the perplexing problem, and presently said: 'I once wrote an essay on this sort of thing; I should like you to read it.' He brought in a copy of *Men and Things* and handed it to me, saying 'I called it "The Encounter" '. In this delightful piece he describes the difficulties he encountered before one of his subjects, 'a group of cypresses, backed with olives, filling a gap in the hills; an old grey wall in front making a kind of pedestal; the ground running steeply below'. That was what in his essay he called the reconnaissance. Two days later he returned for the attack.

" 'I settled myself in my corner, laid box and brushes on the flat stone, scribbled in an outline, dabbed in a sky, measuring its tone at the point where the shadowy side of the cypress impinged on the grey of the olive, and then set to work at the serious business of mixing a wash for the olive—vandyke brown, cobalt blue, yellow ochre, a dash of carmine, a touch of emerald green—too blue, too brown, too green, a thought more carmine—surely just right!

" 'I look up, my brush poised, just at the critical moment when

the sky is wet enough to take the next wash softly. A second later it will be dry and hard. As I look the infernal tree begins to laugh at me—really there is no other way of expressing it. Right and left, all over its surface, it breaks into little ripples of silver light, ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα, if ever there was such a thing. The manœuvre is wholly successful. Once more I am struck with the absurdity of attempting to subdue this sparkling fairy to a grey wash on a piece of white paper. She trembles into a thousand silver spikes, vanishing and reappearing with incredible, speed. I wash out my brush, let my cunning mixture go to waste—and turn to her brother the cypress'."

Spender's brush had not, it must be admitted, the power of his pen, but this passage leaves no room for doubt whether he was an artist or not.

No sketch of Spender's life would be complete without some mention of the Reform Club, which since the thirties of last century has held so large a place in the history of Liberalism in Great Britain. Spender joined the Club in 1899, and frequented it constantly till in about 1940 he ceased to come up to London at all. Some of his closest friends—A. G. Gardiner, Vivian Phillipps, HerbertWorsley—were members, and always sat at lunch at a particular table in the dining-room and in a particular corner of the smoking-room afterwards. "The table" and "the corner" are almost institutions in the lives of those who have a habitual niche at both or either. (They are not identical, for the table only accommodates six, except when an extra place is made for a specially privileged latecomer like Spender; the corner is less limited). Among the more regular occupants of the table in Spender's time were Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, T. E. Page (the well-known, almost even famous, Charterhouse master and editor of Horace), A. G. Gardiner, Frank Swinnerton, J. A. Hobson, among literary or journalistic figures—with a sprinkling of politicians like Lord Buckmaster, Lord Samuel, Lord Rea, Sir Percy Harris, as less regular, but recognised, members of the two circles, table and corner.

If the Club had a large place in Spender's life Spender had a large place in the Club's, as the Club showed by the dinners it twice gave in his honour. The first was in 1928, after his return from a year in America. He described the occasion in a letter to his wife the next day:

"They did me proud at the dinner here last night and I was

quite taken by surprise. I expected 15 or 20 at a round table and an informal talk. There were fifty, which was as much as the room would hold, and they said they had to turn away others. I hope they didn't all come expecting to hear Grey, for he was in bed and had to send a letter. Hugh Bell presided, Simon proposed my health and Runciman seconded—compliments which made me blush and feel a little embarrassed in the presence of other journalists like A. G. Gardiner. Simon said 'I had for thirty years been the adviser of the advisers of the Crown', and dwelt on my international reputation. I couldn't repeat these things except to you. All the circle were there, Wells, Arnold Bennett, Page, Fletcher, the Headmaster of Charterhouse, and many whom I hardly knew. I spoke for about forty minutes mainly on America, and seemed to give satisfaction. Wells, who is chary of compliments, came up to me afterwards and said it was 'profound and penetrating'. Hugh was there and said he liked it. It was all extraordinarily nice and kind—a compliment which the Club has not for years paid to any of its own members."

But this took second place, both intrinsically and in Spender's mind, to the compliment paid him by his Club friends at a dinner arranged in July 1937 to celebrate his admission to the Companionship of Honour. Here again what needs to be said of the dinner is best said in Spender's own words; the letter, as nine years before, is to his wife:

"It really was rather a wonderful occasion—about 50 at dinner, and many more would have come if there had been room. Gardiner said that if they had known they would have asked for the big dining-room. In addition to the 'family' there were people like H. G. Wells, Arthur Salter, Plender, Sir Robert Hamilton, Percy Harris, Murray Butler. Wells most forthcoming, said he wanted to shout at the end of my speech and was only prevented because it would not have been thought good Club manners. Everyone said the speeches were good, and right in length. What pleased me most was what Crewe said about my dearest—'That gifted lady who has been his constant help-meet and inspirer throughout his working life.' I could have hugged him for that, and it was received with great applause.

"The things said about me were of course beyond belief, but what I liked best was that there did seem to be a note of genuine personal affection in the speeches and in the audience. At some

points it was as near being emotional as such a thing can be, and a little unsteadying when one has to keep one's head cool and one's thoughts consecutive for a speech.

Crewe said I was one of the great Oxford and Balliol vintage of the late 'seventies and 'eighties, with Asquith, Milner, Curzon and Grey. He dwelt on the continuity and all-roundness of my work, how I had made myself an expert on India and Egypt, as well as on home and European affairs. Herbert Samuel quoted a Latin tag, 'honor sequitur fugientem,' which he translated 'honour pursues and catches up him who flees from it'—an allusion to my having declined other honours. Gardiner spoke as if I were a mixture of Hazlitt and Burke, with a little of Walter Bagehot thrown in—a neat, brief and charmingly pointed speech. Somebody else said that as a historian I was a master of that very unusual thing—vivid narrative combined with complete reliability.

"The ink blushes as I put it down, and I only do to you, because I promised and you asked me. I was very glad that I was not overprepared, for I was able to hang most of my reply on to the things said in the speeches."

The last paragraph makes it relevant to say a word about Spender as a speaker. Here once more the monotonous "competent" imposes itself almost inevitably. For Spender was not a natural orator, not among those who definitely enjoy speaking. He found it easier to write a leading article than to say the same thing in a speech. But his matter was invariably good, and he was never reduced to hesitations or repetitions. Sometimes, indeed, he reached a markedly high level. Rosebery, in one of his earliest letters to him, in May 1899, observes of a dinner of the Newsvendors' Benevolent Institution:

> "You made the best speech last night, which is, perhaps, not saying much. But yours was intrinsically good, and annoys the professional speaker by the reflection that the leader-writer beat him at his own game. The worst of it is that I can't write leaders!"

Such praise from such a quarter must be regarded as authoritative, and there is no reason for assuming that the competence Spender had achieved in 1899 diminished with the passage of years.

But, to revert to the Reform Club. In 1938 a proposal to have his portrait painted for the Club gave Spender great pleasure, and so did

the warm approval which met his suggestion that the artist should be Clive Gardiner, the son of his old friend A. G. G. The work was not carried out under ideal conditions, for Spender was not able to sit in Mr. Gardiner's studio, but the result gave general satisfaction. The portrait hangs in the small dining-room of the Club (where both the dinners described above were held), next to one of T. E. Page by the same artist. It was presented to Spender in November 1938 at a dinner which was marked incidentally, and a little disconcertingly, by an interesting concurrence of appraisement of the chief guest. A. G. Gardiner, who was supporting the toast of Spender's health, had decided to build his speech round two lines from Pope's "Epistle to Mr. Addison":

> "Who broke no promise, served no private end,
> Who gained no title and who lost no friend,"

but so, unfortunately had Lord Simon—and Lord Simon spoke first. It was a difficult situation for the seconder, but he adapted himself skilfully to it and the company took the view that you could never have too much of a good quotation.

This was only one of several honours that fell to Spender in the last years of his working life. (He had been made a Deputy-Lieutenant of the County of London in 1929.) As to the Companionship of Honour, it may be surmised that it was a special pleasure to Mr. Baldwin (who as an ex-President of both the Classical and the English Associations had strong enough cultural affinities with Spender to span whatever political gulf separated them) to offer this distinction—even though the suggestion first came, as I believe it did, from a Liberal quarter. Among the many letters of congratulation (several suggesting that it should have been the O.M., not the C.H.), one from Dr. G. M. Trevelyan is particularly happy.

> "DEAR SPENDER [the Master of Trinity wrote],
> It is well that Honour should have you among its Companions, for it has been the principle of your life, and has stood in the way of higher preferments which you have much more than earned.
> Yrs very truly,
> G. M. TREVELYAN."

In 1939 Spender was elected a member of the Athenæum under the well-known Rule II, which provides for the admission each

year of a few persons "of distinguished eminence in science, literature or the arts, or for public services"; Lord Baldwin, as he had now become, specially desired to be the proposer, and Lord Crewe was the seconder. Finally, in 1940, he was invited to be the "Charter President" of the Institute of Journalists in its Jubilee year. That meant, as he wrote to someone with just satisfaction, recognising him as the head of his profession. It was in a fit succession. In 1907 the British editors visiting Germany had chosen him as their spokesman; in 1909, when the Imperial Press Union held its conference in London, he was elected Chairman of the Conference Committee; now, thirty years later, his colleagues in the profession invested him again with the same primacy.

Chapter VI

RELIGION AND LIFE

No man's life can be fully understood without some knowledge of his attitude towards unseen things, but to write of Spender's religion is difficult. He wrote little, and spoke little, of it himself. Of his integrity and his unswerving loyalty to principle much could be said. But personal religion is something other than that, and of Spender's personal religion the world got few glimpses. This chapter will therefore necessarily be brief, for in such matters, of all matters, to carry assumption and speculation beyond the limits of the evidence is beyond excuse; but it is not a chapter that could be omitted from any full account of Spender's life.

The household at Bath in which the boy grew up may be broadly described as orthodox Anglican, but his experience of public worship was catholic, for he was in the habit of going with some of the family to church, with others to some nonconformist service, on alternate Sundays. The school chapel might have been expected to make the greatest impression on him, but there is no evidence that it did. Fifty years later he spoke of his old headmaster T. W. Dunn as being by far the strongest influence in his life during his school days and for many years after, but he does not speak of him, even in the memorial address on Dunn which he delivered in Bath Abbey in 1932, as primarily a religious influence—certainly not as the inspirer of any formal religious views. Then came

Oxford. There must have been talks on religion there, but we hear nothing of them. There was College Chapel, with sermons by Jowett—on "The Joys and Aspirations of Youth", on "The Completion of Life's Work", both in Spender's first year—and in the corner of one of the freshman's first letters home a postscript reads: "I attended the communion service in Chapel this morning."

Another letter a few months later, in March of 1883, is more revealing. Dr. Spender had evidently written the kind of letter so many fathers, and still more so many mothers, write to their sons at college, and in this case the son responded with respect, but at the same time with spirit.

> "I thought," he writes, "I had sufficiently answered everything in your former letter which required answering. You touched upon some other matters which do not admit of a direct answer. Religion and religious beliefs—to anyone who reasons seriously—must be matters of conviction after careful thought. There can be no question of willingness or unwillingness to believe certain things. Christian doctrines are for the most part of such a comforting nature that no reasonable man would willingly reject them. Therefore you must let me say that I do a little feel the severity of tone in your letter, which implies more or less of blame. I am bound to think these matters out for myself, and am equally bound to accept the conclusions I come to—not in any way, however, so as to exclude further modifications of these when they seem reasonable. If therefore the conclusions which I come to differ somewhat from those which you come to you must forgive me, and rest assured that I do think seriously about these things. And opinions which are forced upon others without thought are rarely of much value. This, I think, ought to be the attitude of every religious discussion."

The undergraduate who wrote so was a few months over twenty. Not till he has become a man of approaching eighty do we find in his published, or so far as I know in his unpublished, writing any clear indication of the content of his belief. Scattered references to religion there may be, but the question here is not what Spender thought about religion in the abstract, but what religion meant to him, and what part it played in his personal life. On that we must be content with fleeting glimpses, remembering that in anything he wrote on such a subject he was more likely to understate than over-

state. Of anything like religious emotionalism he was constitutionally incapable, and incapable equally of carrying his professions an inch beyond the limit of his experience. All dogma he rigorously eschewed. If anyone had asked him whether he was a Christian he would have accepted rather than repudiated the description, but he would not, I think, have applied it to himself spontaneously. Except in the last few years of his life he had not, since he left the Bath home, been in the habit of attending church, but when Mr. and Mrs. Spender were in London they went regularly to Westminster Chapel to hear Dr. Campbell Morgan. That explains why in an article written in 1912 Spender was able to evince sufficient familiarity with Anglican and Free Church services to compare them critically to some purpose (and to conclude that "my ideal church would give me an Anglican cathedral service, followed by a first-rate Nonconformist preacher").

At any rate Spender was no mere humanist. He believed in God. There is no doubt, I think, that he believed in the working of God in history. It is difficult not to ascribe at least that much faith to a man who writes: "If in the seeming welter of human affairs it is impossible to disengage the moral from the physical, or to believe that the mind under conscious control is one element in the mysterious evolution of things, statesmanship is an imposture, and we may as well yield ourselves unresistingly to the stream of tendency, whatever that may be. The belief in the mind under conscious control is thus at the end of it all the minimum of faith required of the public man." Spender counted himself, of course, a public man; the passage occurs in *The Public Life*, published in 1925.*

Whatever his beliefs, he held them more confidently and unquestioningly in the last months of his life than ever before. So far as I know he only once put on paper anything like a confession of his faith. That was in his last book *Between Two Wars*, which he

*Where evidence is so sparse this passage from a letter written to A. G. Gardiner in December 1940 has some relevance: "I have been reading Inge's *Fall of the Idols*, and wondering why this Christian man should be so furiously angry with anyone who thinks that human society can be improved, i.e. brought into conformity with what he defines as religion. Faith, he says,—and this is a good saying—'is the resolution to stand or fall by the noblest hypothesis'. Yes, but if so why should faith in 'progress' be denounced as 'wishful thinking'? . . . The believer in progress has undoubtedly what the religious call 'trials to faith' in these days. Listening to the Polish exile's broadcast on what the Nazis have done to his country one had the sense of being in Hell. Yet what carries us on but a grim determination to make an end of it, and a belief in our bones that it is contrary to 'reason and the will of God' as Matt. Arnold used to say?"

finished a few days before his death and did not live to pass for press. The opening paragraph of Chapter VIII surprised some even of his close friends, who did not know that he had ever gone so far as taking an active part in public worship.

"A few years ago," he wrote there, "the vicar of the parish in which I was then living [Marden, in Kent] asked me if I would read the lessons in his church. I said yes, but added that I thought I ought to tell him that there was only one article in the creeds of the Church that I thoroughly and honestly accepted: 'I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life'. Not *a* ghost, but *the Holy Ghost*—compelling us, in spite of everything, to think of it as Holy, the something not ourselves making for righteousness, the Comforter, the Supporter, the Fighter who refuses to accept defeat and is not cast down by any obstacle or seeming set-back. The vicar said 'Enough'; and for several years I read the lessons at the evening service in his church."

Telling the same story to a friend in a letter dated January 16th 1941, Spender developed it a little:

> "He [the vicar] said it was enough for me to read the lessons. as I did in the evening for several years, though not enough to admit me to the sacrament." He went on: "I have never got beyond this, or gone back on it. To me the spirit is something much more than the philosopher's or the intellectual's 'life-principle'. It is something which compels us in spite of everything to think of it as 'holy', and which seems to be struggling to find expression in history. This is heresy both to the orthodox who cling desperately to their idea of an omnipotent all-loving God and to the rationalists who want logical proof of everything. There is no proof in their sense of any general ideas about the meaning of existence. These must be founded on the individual's thought and experience. I can only say that my own thought and experience lead me more and more to this conviction, and not least in these times when the great rally to what is good and decent is at least as encouraging as the assault of the devil is the reverse. What is it but the Holy Spirit which is leading thousands who have no orthodox belief to the conviction that there is something much more important than life for which their lives must cheerfully be given? Nothing by rationalist standards could be more irrational than that belief, if there were not something deep in the nature of things corresponding with it." And after protesting against the orthodox who pro-

fessed to see in the horrors of the hour blessings in disguise, things sent to "try our faith", he adds: "Plato—much more wisely—said that nothing must be imputed to God which would be thought wicked if imputed to man. The great disaster of Christian theology has been its departure from that rule."

But he is scrupulously explicit. No one must credit him with beliefs he does not hold. He will recite no creeds; he will profess no doctrines. The whole of this chapter in *Between the Wars* must be read by anyone concerned to understand how he beat his music out. Here only one or two salient passages can be quoted—but they must be. Reverting to his reading of the lessons, particularly the second lessons, Spender writes: "Reading the Gospels aloud does, in an extraordinary way, bring home to one their beauty and simplicity, their sudden plunges into the mysterious and the profound, the unexpected and the paradoxical. But it also throws into the background all the accretions from Pauline legalism, Greek Neo-Platonism, Oriental mystery cults, which have turned them into a theology. The figure of Jesus becomes the absorbing interest. One sees Him more and more as the supreme example for the Western world of a life lived according to the Spirit, and one seeks hungrily for the least fragment of His authentic words, whether in the variants of the Gospel manuscripts, or in the logia of the Oxyrhyncus papyri. I have put in the qualification 'for the Western world', for it is impossible for anyone who has travelled to exclude other religions which still hold the allegiance of more than half the world—the religion of Buddha, with its self-less ideal and entirely logical theory of reincarnation on the upward way; the religion of Mahomet, with its fervent monotheism, and alloy of fanatical militancy.

"This, I know," he goes on, "will seem presumptuous heresy to those who believe in a universal faith, absolute and binding, once delivered to the saints. Who am I, I shall be asked, to set myself above the authority of the Church, indeed of Christ Himself, who founded His church upon a rock and has inspired its teaching? Indeed, I am no one, but when churchmen themselves ask why churches are empty and why religion, as they understand it, has lost its hold on reasonably intelligent people who are, nevertheless, seeking for a religion, I am entitled to bear my witness. This is, briefly, that while I believe fervently in the religion of the Spirit, and acknowledge Christ as the incarnation of the Spirit, I cannot accept formulas and doctrines fetched from ancient and mediæval

times which seem to me to despiritualise Him and to perpetuate a conception of God which, though natural in its historical setting cannot be reconciled with what we now know of the physical universe".

Dualism he frankly accepts. Is it not "inherent in our experience, and even in the Christian gospel itself? Does not the Devil appear throughout the Scriptures in antagonism to God, tempting the Saviour, the bringer of death and damnation, with Whom the Lord and Giver of Life is in perpetual conflict? Does not this correspond to our own inner and outer experience, with what we know is going on within us, with what history tells us, and what we see in the world around us? I know of no reason why we should conclude that this mass of experience does not correspond with reality—or at all events the reality which concerns us as mortals. Still less why we should be driven to explanations which explain away what seem to be the evident facts of life, and compel us to choose between omnipotence and benevolence, and ask us to accept what we know to be monstrous evils as 'blessings in disguise'."

And finally—"Let me add, as a last word, that I am not in the least abashed when my friends call me a mystic, nor ashamed to confess that I believe that they and I will, in some sense, survive the death of the body and remain a part of the universe into which we have been born and are indissolubly associated. I hold this to be rational and scientific belief."

The sequence of the argument has proceeded some way from its starting-point, the reading of lessons in Marden church. But to that it now returns. Spender, with his passion for sincerity—it might almost be said his terror of any semblance of insincerity—was concerned lest articles he might be writing during the controversy on the Revised Prayer Book in 1927 should seem incompatible at any point with the profession he was making by standing publicly at the lectern week by week. He wrote to his vicar about this, and attached sufficient importance to the letter to leave a copy, or the rough draft, of it among his papers. That is a sufficient reason for giving it *in extenso* here.

"My Dear Vicar (he wrote),

I have cancelled an article I was writing on the controversy about the Revised Prayer Book because I felt that if it were published over my name without my having warned you it would probably put you in the embarrassing position of having to ask me to refrain from reading the lessons in church. It is

always a pleasure to me to attend your services and to do this little part, but the present circumstances bring me to the conclusion that for your sake as well as my own I had better be an unnoticed member of your congregation.

Conformity and non-conformity are for most men of my age [66] a matter of private conscience, but they can hardly be so for a writer who more and more feels religion to be invading his subjects, and his thoughts straying outside the traditional boundaries. I have a chapter now on my table* dealing with the religious life of our time which will probably be published in the course of this year. I feel I can't suppress it, and I don't think it would offend you, but I could not expect your assent to it. This, if I live, will probably be followed in the next three years by a volume wholly on religion subjects [it never was] which will probably take me into even deeper waters. I feel the presumption of even stating this plan, but on the other side there is the danger that if we laymen rule religion out of our sphere the mass of people will more and more come to consider it a doctrinal controversy within the Churches, and the secularisation of the common life be without any religious check.

I am sure you will believe that this is written in goodwill and friendship and that I have no thought of hostility to you or your work. I simply feel the difficulty of seeming to sail under false colours. That has been brought home to me by this debate and by the arguments of both sides equally. I am sure I ought not to profess a conformity which I do not feel, a profession which must be exposed unless I cut myself off from writing on religious subjects. But I am truly and sincerely sorry that you should have such an uncomfortable parishioner.

Yours very sincerely,
J. A. SPENDER."

Of which it can only be said that if there is an abiding-place where the souls of "humble men of heart" find rest, or scope, the soul of Alfred Spender is surely there to-day. The letter does not appear to have had the expected consequence. Spender mentions elsewhere that he only gave up reading the lessons on the advent of a new incumbent whose views on such matters were not those of his predecessor. It would indeed have been strange if the vicar, whom Spender's original confession of a limited faith had satisfied, had felt that the writer of such a letter was further from the

*Evidently Chap. xxxvi of *Life, Journalism and Politics.*

Kingdom of God than when he first began to "do this little part" at the evening service.

When Spender was staying at Crowborough in 1941 he went to a communion service with Mrs. Spender—joining her thus for the first time since their marriage in 1892—but he did not himself communicate. The next year, less than two months before his death, he sent Herbert Worsley a letter which contained a moving passage. "Now I am making confidences," it ran, "I am going to tell you something else. I am strangely, wonderfully happy. I get an assurance from deep down within me that all is well for us both, and that we are going on together, though I don't know where and how. There are moments of depression, but whenever this comes it possesses me and is irresistible, and becomes more and more permanent thought, suppressing the pains that are my portion. Make what you will of this. I am not at all ashamed if anyone calls me superstitious or a mystic".

That was on 22nd April. A letter of 27th May to the same friend contained the sentence: "To-day I have had very strongly the feeling of which I told you, of assured happiness, irrational, irresistible, yet filling the gap." He was saying the same to Mrs. Spender. And he said to her repeatedly: "We have got to get back to God." "Unless the world gets back to God it hasn't a chance". "We ought to *hurry* back to God." Such was his testimony, and his testament, as he felt the Angel of Death approaching and began to hear the beating of his wings.

Chapter VII

POLITICS AND PERSONS

The best measure of the position Spender held, during his *Westminster* days in particular, as not merely a journalist but a journalist-statesman, is provided by his correspondence with the Ministers, administrators and diplomatists of the time. Such men are not given to writing private letters indiscriminately to editors of morning or evening papers on matters of State, and it is pretty certain that during the Liberal administrations of 1905-1915 no journalist was the recipient of so many confidences (or could so safely be entrusted with them). It might be going too far, but not a great deal too far,

to say that the Campbell-Bannerman Government owed its existence very largely to Spender. For years past, ever since the Boer War split the Liberal Party into two camps, he had been labouring ceaselessly to effect reconciliations and bridge gulfs. If success in that had not been achieved, no doubt through the efforts of others as well as his, neither Campbell-Bannerman nor anyone else could have hoped to get the dissident elements together into one Cabinet.

Even as it was C.B. came within an inch of failure. Among Spender's papers is a memorandum in which he has set down day by day, almost indeed hour by hour, his own part in the negotiations of the vital week in December 1905 in which the question whether Grey and Haldane, without whom no Liberal Government could be formed, would accept office hung in the balance. The machinery was set in motion when on November 30th, a Wednesday, Spender, lunching with Esher, was told by him that Balfour would positively resign on the following Monday or Tuesday, that it was imperative that C.B. (then in Scotland) should come to London at once, and that in spite of the Rosebery split the Liberals must be ready to take office as a united party. Spender thereupon got in touch with Sir Robert Hudson, (Secretary of the National Liberal Federation), who wired to Herbert Gladstone, the Chief Liberal Whip, to come to London. The next day, December 1st, Spender, Hudson and Gladstone discussed prospects at lunch, and Gladstone wired to C.B. On December 2nd, Spender, Esher and Morley lunched together; Morley promised to wire to C.B. to come at once; they discussed appointments, Spender observing that the Foreign Office, of course, must go to Grey. Morley suggested Elgin instead, on which Spender commented that "speaking as a journalist the double task of explaining why Grey was not appointed and of inventing Elgin from the beginning would break my back, and I should not attempt it". (Elgin became Colonial Secretary.) On December 3rd, Spender wrote asking Arthur Acland to come to town, thinking he would be useful in the event of difficulties with the more or less Roseberyite Haldane and Grey and possibly Asquith—as it turned out a most fortunate move.

C.B. meanwhile had arrived, and on Monday, December 4th, he asked Spender to see him; he was in fact waiting to go to Buckingham Palace, where Balfour was understood to be at that moment handing in his resignation. They talked for about three-quarters of an hour, particularly on the Irish question, C.B. speaking well of Grey and Asquith in that connection. On Tuesday, December 5th, the crisis broke. Herbert Gladstone asked Spender

if he could come round to Parliament Street. "I found him, Spender writes, "much disturbed, and he told me that Grey had been to C.B. at Berkeley Square and told him point-blank that he would not accept office unless he [C.B.] went to the House of Lords and undertook the leadership there, leaving the Commons leadership to Asquith. Asquith and Haldane were understood to have come to the same decision. C.B. was greatly wounded and surprised, and described Grey as coming to him 'all buttoned up and never undoing one button'. For the moment C.B. had refused to yield, and the situation was in the highest degree precarious. H.G. said that if the three stood out it would be impossible to form a Government." Spender said that, if C.B. refused to yield, the one man who might influence Grey and Haldane was Acland, who was (at Spender's instance) coming to London the next day.

Lord Tweedmouth then took a hand. Happening to call to see Spender at the *Westminster* office, he was told of the position, and went at once to see C.B., going on afterwards to Spender's house in Sloane Street to report that C.B. was greatly wounded at the idea of being "kicked upstairs", and especially that the youngest of his prospective Ministers should be behind the move. On Wednesday, December 6th, Herbert Gladstone told Spender that C.B. was moving towards the acceptance of a peerage, but would not decide till he had talked it over with Lady C.B. Acland, meanwhile, had arrived in London and was told the whole story by Spender; both agreed that for C.B. to form a Cabinet without Grey and Haldane (anxiety about Asquith appears to have diminished) would be an "enormous disaster". From this point Acland took up the running, and had a first interview with the two recalcitrants; he reported to Spender that Grey was "quite immovable by any ordinary argument". On December 7th, Herbert Gladstone brought the news that C.B. had definitely decided not to go to the Lords, and that Grey in consequence had as definitely decided not to join the new Government.

"H.G.," writes Spender, "regarded everything as lost, but I pointed out [and it may well have been the greatest of all Spender's services in this fevered week] that there were still three days before any list need be published, and begged him to keep all possible doors open in the interval." Spender himself went to Acland, who set about making various personal contacts. Grey the same evening wrote to C.B. definitely declining office. Later Acland twice saw Grey and Haldane and made some impression on them; he begged Spender to persuade C.B. not to fill the Foreign Office or War

Office till his (Acland's) efforts had irrevocably failed. That was done, Acland persisted in his endeavours, and early on Friday morning (December 8th) Spender found a letter from him, written late on the previous evening, saying that he *believed* he had at last succeeded. At midday the Press Association issued a statement from Grey to the effect that a *Times* article saying that he had refused office was "unauthorised and incorrect". Finally, as climax to a week of tireless and nerve-racking effort, there came the same day a letter from Herbert Gladstone:

MY DEAR SPENDER,

I return A.A.'s letter. All's well that ends well. You and he between you have saved the situation.

Yours always,

H. GLADSTONE.

When the list of Campbell-Bannerman's Ministers was published it included Grey as Foreign Secretary and Haldane as Secretary of State for War. Acland had been responsible for finally dispelling the doubts and discontents, but it was Spender who had brought Acland on the scene, just as it was he who brought Herbert Gladstone, and through him Campbell-Bannerman, to London as soon as Esher had given him foreknowledge of Balfour's imminent resignation.

This transaction is related in some detail, not merely for its intrinsic interest and importance but as indicating the part Spender was perpetually playing behind the scenes in great affairs. Other incidents illustrating that (some of them mentioned elsewhere in this volume) were his successive (and successful) appeals first to Lloyd George and then to Lord Derby to prevail on Sir Alfred Keogh to retain his post as Director-General of Army Medical Services till the end of the war; his share in getting Kitchener stopped from returning to Egypt in August 1914; the fact (which he mentions in an unpublished memorandum) that he saw Grey at the Foreign Office every day of the first week of the same August; his success in getting the British Consulate brought back to Paris from Bordeaux in the first month of war, and his much greater success in securing the reorganisation of the medical services in France; the commission given him by Asquith in 1915 to tell Fisher that Churchill (with whom the First Sea Lord had fallen out over the Dardanelles) was leaving the Admiralty and being succeeded as First Lord by Balfour. There must have been times during these years when Cabinet Ministers

found it hard to remember that Spender was not one of their number.*

But if the great days for Spender as a journalist were the great days of the Liberal Party, from the beginning of 1906 till war came in 1914, his contacts with persons of importance in one field or another were developed long before that. To Mr. Gladstone he had been introduced while he was still editing the *Eastern Morning News*, and he received messages and suggestions from him during his brief association with the *Pall Mall Gazette*. But there was nothing that could be called familiar acquaintance, and when in 1896, in his first year as Editor of the *Westminster*, Spender despatched a telegram to Hawarden, hoping to elicit a statement for publication on some question of the moment, the reply was that the now finally retired leader was "indisposed to interfere". Two years later, in 1898, he was more fortunate in a similar quest with Lord Wolseley, for, having asked that great soldier for various particulars regarding the strength and requirements of the British Army, he received a long manuscript letter detailing reforms made by and since Cardwell, and containing *inter alia* the observation (in relation to the strength of the home army): "A few wild Navy men say invasion is impossible, but Nelson, Collingwood, Wellington and Napoleon believed it to be possible under certain very possible conditions. I prefer to base my calculations upon the opinions of the great soldiers and sailors I have mentioned than upon the arguments of inexperienced sailors like Admiral X."†

Spender's first communication from an eminent Balliol man, Lord Curzon, appears to have been a letter despatched in December 1905 from the Ritz Hotel, Paris. The date is of some significance, for it was just four months after Curzon had resigned the Viceroyalty of India as result of the Cabinet's decision in Kitchener's favour in the controversy over the control of the Indian Army. That, indeed, was the subject of the letter. The Military Correspondent of the *Westminster* had made what the ex-Viceroy described roundly as "a number of absolutely untrue statements" on the vexed question, and

*Some weeks after writing this chapter I came on an article on Spender, written in 1939 by A. G. Gardiner in the Journal of the Institute of Journalists, and containing the sentence: "During the generation before the war (the First German War) he was a sort of Minister without Portfolio, so close were his relations with Government and so various and confidential were the services for which his genius for moderating counsel, smoothing differences and allaying the acerbities of political life was evoked."

†With this may be profitably compared Fisher's views on the same subject. See p. 129.

the ex-Viceroy with characteristic industry and spirit devoted five quarto pages to educating the Editor of the *Westminster* on the whole subject. When Curzon wrote Campbell-Bannerman's Government had been just three weeks in office, and it is possible to detect in his letter a fleeting hope that his political opponents might somehow reverse the decision of his political friends. That at least seems a reasonable inference from the passage: "I would only implore you in the interest of India—which is the sole thing I care about—to save India from one of the most deplorable blunders that has ever been committed at her expense—and not to allow your military correspondent to add further misstatements to the already grave responsibility that rests on him." Hereafter, as has already been mentioned, Curzon established a standing relation with Tudor Street by sending in regular entries in the remarkable competitions in Greek and Latin verse, and renderings into French, in the *Saturday Westminster*, not infrequently figuring among the prize-winners.

It was not till 1915 that Curzon became a Cabinet Minister. Meanwhile he had been elected Chancellor of Oxford University, and in 1909 he wrote commending to Spender his memorandum ("it amounts to a book") on University Reform. Three years later it was a book, or booklet (*The Indian Scene*) by Spender that evoked a letter. The subject was India, whence Spender had just returned, and Curzon warmly approved of the work. But on one point—the controversial question of the partition of Bengal, effected by him in 1905 and reversed in 1911—he had a case of his own to put. "I detect one small mistake," he wrote. "Someone is made to say on p. 71: 'If Curzon had taken the trouble to consult the Civil Service about the partition of Bengal . . .' Well, he did—all the usual people were consulted, and all their replies were printed in vast Parliamentary Blue Books which neither you nor anyone read—and all were favourable to the scheme!" There is an unusual flourish about the signature which immediately follows—a reflection, no doubt, of the satisfaction which self-vindication imparts.

In 1919 Curzon became Foreign Secretary in place of Balfour (realising too late, as he once told me, that control over foreign affairs had been transferred, temporarily at any rate, from the south side of Downing Street to the north), and one of his earliest acts was to invite Spender to serve on the Milner Mission to Egypt, greeting his acceptance with a letter of warm satisfaction, which expressed the conviction that "your presence upon it will be a great element of strength, and will, I think, give much satisfaction to Liberal opinion (and not that only) throughout the country". In choosing Spender

as one of a body of six, of whom two others, Milner and Sir Rennell Rodd (subsequently Lord Rennell) were, like Curzon himself, Balliol men, he observed that the thing would probably be called a Balliol conspiracy, but he was willing to risk that. The story of the Milner Mission and of Spender's special part in it is told elsewhere in this volume.* The Cabinet refused to act on the report of the Mission, though Curzon, showing himself, like his Conservative Cabinet colleague Milner, decidedly Liberal in this matter, strongly advocated its acceptance. It is to this period that most of Spender's correspondence with Milner, whom he had first met in 1898, the year before the South African War, belongs; that too is dealt with in the chapter devoted to the record of the Milner Mission.

Prominent in Spender's pre-1906 correspondence is a series of letters to and from Sir Cecil Spring-Rice at St. Petersburg, most of them in the year 1905, during which the Russo-Japanese war ended and the Anglo-Japanese Treaty, in which Russia took an intense and suspicious interest, was renewed. Spender's *aperçus* of home affairs must have been of high value to a diplomat in a distant and important post. On the other hand Spring-Rice's shrewd and well-informed comments on the affairs not only of Russia but of all Europe were calculated to be of peculiar service to a journalist writing extensively on foreign affairs, but they have little relation (apart from their references to Russia's perennial concern about the opening of the Straits) to any situation existing to-day.

Of greater interest, if on personal grounds only, are various letters, the first dated 1904, from Mr. Winston Churchill. Spender had met him first, at Northcliffe's house, in 1900, the year in which the future Prime Minister, after being captured by the Boers when a war correspondent, escaping from them and then fighting against them, had returned to London and decided to go into politics. He was disturbed that the admirable speeches he was making in different parts of the country were not being reported, and asked Spender what he could do about it. Spender suggested sagaciously, and about fifty per cent in earnest, that the way for a rising young politician to attract attention was to deliver a ferocious attack on one of his own leaders and see that the reporters got a summary of the speech in advance; no doubt the fact that the leaders in question were Spender's political opponents lent some zest to the recommendation. But Spender's assistance went beyond good advice. From time to time he gave Churchill suggestions for his speeches, and a letter of later date conveys warm thanks for "the admirable

*p. 190 *seqq.*

notes you gave me for my Sheffield speech. Grey was delighted, and *everyone* seems pleased. I added a tail of my own, and I hope you will think the join was skilfully smoothed over." It is difficult to believe that Mr. Churchill ever delivered a speech in which he claimed authorship only of the tail; at any rate it may be assumed that if ever any tail wagged any dog it was this one.

Though elected a Unionist M.P. in 1900, Churchill soon found himself at odds with his party on the tariff issue, and in 1904 he wrote to Spender strongly pressing the claims of the Conservative Free Trade candidate for Stalybridge to friendly treatment in the *Westminster*. Not only that, but "above all jam the incident under Chamberlain's nose—before he speaks at Limehouse to-morrow night." The next letter comes from the Midland Hotel, Manchester, where the writer was fighting (successfully) as Liberal candidate at the end of 1905, to thank Spender very warmly for his "illuminating" review of Winston's life of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, which had just appeared. One sentence from the letter constitutes a just and discerning tribute to one of the reviewer's most notable qualities: "It is wonderful how you throw on subjects a light of your own—calm but searching. You found ideas I would gladly have incorporated had they occurred to me in time. And after all, I pondered for 3½ years, and you had fewer days."

A similar, and equally just, tribute came in 1907 in a letter written on a boat on the White Nile, where the Under-Secretary to the Colonial Office, as he then was, was spending a winter holiday. Spender had written him a useful letter reviewing the political situation at home, and on it he commented: "I really feel quite up-to-date in politics. You have such a steady wise outlook upon events, and no one judges of them in more just proportion." Then follows a passage of striking prophetic importance, evincing a social enthusiasm which, when the writer became a Cabinet Minister a few months later, made its full contribution to the decisions on which the great Liberal social reform programme of 1908-1914 was based. None of the reforms, it must be remembered, had taken shape when this letter was written.

> "Politics," Churchill wrote, "are in the trough of steady humdrum. The people are not satisfied; but neither are they offended with the Government. No legislation at present in view interests the democracy. All their minds are turning more and more to the social and democratic issue. This revolution is irresistible. They will not tolerate the existing system by which

wealth is acquired, shared and employed. They may not be able, they may be willing to recognise themselves unable, to devise a new system. I think them very ready to be guided, and patient beyond conception. But they will set their faces like flint against the money power—heir of all other powers and tyrannies overthrown—and its obvious iniquities. And this theoretical repulsion will ultimately extend to any party associated in maintaining the *status quo*. But further—however willing the working classes may be to remain in passive opposition merely to the existing social system, they will not continue to bear, they cannot, the awful uncertainties of their lives. Minimum standards of wages and comfort, insurance in some effective form or other against sickness, unemployment, old age—these are the questions, and the only questions, by which parties are going to live in the future. Woe to Liberalism if they slip through its fingers. This is the fruit of my Central African reflections, and this is the sort of tune I think I will sing at Birmingham on 23rd January. 'Social Bulwarks', 'Security', 'Standardisation'. But we must have a talk beforehand."

On that it only remains to add that Liberalism did not let the opportunity slip through its fingers. Within the next four years the foundations of a great social reform structure had been laid in the Acts, sponsored by Asquith, Churchill and Lloyd George respectively, establishing Old Age Pensions, Labour Exchanges and National Health Insurance.

In 1908 came a slight difference of view between Spender and Churchill on a minor question. Lloyd George, then President of the Board of Trade, had invited Spender to serve on a Departmental Committee on what would now be called the "rationalisation" of the railways. Spender became greatly interested in the subject, and hoped that a report of real importance would result from the committee's work. But in the course of 1908 Churchill succeeded Lloyd George at the Board of Trade. He, according to Spender, "seemed to care nothing about these railway problems, and the committee was not his child. He sat dutifully in the chair, but he found the subject tedious and complicated, and rapidly wound us up with a perfunctory report which bore no relation to our labours or what most of us intended to be the result."

The next year brought a different kind of contact. Spender was chairman of a committee which was arranging the meetings of the Imperial Press Conference in London, and Churchill was among the

speakers invited. He was to deal with "Literature and Journalism" (with Morley, Birrell and Milner), and did duly deal with it, but not, it would seem, without some promptings, as of old, by Spender. At any rate he wrote from the Board of Trade that he was highly honoured by the invitation, but the subject was so wide and general that it conveyed nothing to his mind, so "will you kindly tell me what is expected of me and suggest a few lines of thought on which I might work. I should be delighted to speak but cannot do so without something to say."

Late in his life—little more, indeed, than six months before his death—something impelled Spender to interesting and not unimportant reminiscences of his contacts with Churchill in the years between 1905 and 1910. In a sudden digression in a letter to Herbert Worsley, on 10th December, 1941, he writes:

"Did you see the reprint of Winston's eulogy of Asquith in the *Weekly Dispatch* on Sunday? What it brings back! The complaint that he would never talk politics 'out of hours' was quite untrue so far as I was concerned. He talked voluminously about everything to me, perhaps because I wasn't a colleague. Loreburn made a scene with me about it: What right had I, a mere journalist, to the confidences of the P.M.?

"In December 1905, when the Government was forming, C.B. asked me to tell McKenna and Winston that they might have between them the Financial Secretaryship to the Treasury and the Under-Secretaryship at the Colonial Office. I told McKenna, and he reported the next day that Winston had unhesitatingly chosen the Colonial Office. He was long-headed even then, and foresaw that, with Kimberley* in the Lords, he would have to defend the settlement in South Africa which C.B. was preparing. Very well he did it, and it laid the foundations of his fortunes as a House of Commons man.

"Then what rows I had with him and Lloyd George over McKenna's naval estimates in 1909, and, by a queer turn of the wheel, with Lloyd George alone over Winston's estimates in 1914! Each in turn used to threaten to get me unshipped from the *Westminster* if I wouldn't do what they wanted, but the difference between them was that L.G. really meant it, but Winston was only chaffing. I don't think I saw him once between 1922 and 1937, but then I met him again casually and we picked

*A slip. Elgin, not Kimberley, was Colonial Secretary; he was, of course, in the Lords.

up the old threads. Now I am quite at ease with him, and a few months ago he asked me to write to him or send him notes through Brendan Bracken. Both reply so civilly, and sometimes so fully, that I hesitate to put them to the trouble."

In saying that he had not seen Churchill between 1922 and 1937 Spender evidently forgot one encounter well worth recalling; though it disturbs chronological sequence it will be convenient to mention it here. In December 1929 Spender lunched at Wimborne House, and in a letter to Mrs. Spender gave an account of the conversation.

"There was," he said, "a party of 20, including Winston, D'Abernon, Lansbury, Citrine, Duff Cooper, Lionel Earle, Arch. Sinclair, etc., with Mrs. Snowden as the only woman. I sat between Lionel Earle and Lansbury, and after lunch the talk became a trialogue between Winston, Lansbury and myself about the present economic situation. The object of the party was to consider the economic reconstruction of Parliament and Government, the subject of two or more chapters in my *Public Life*, published more than four years ago. Possibly I seemed rather abnormally equipped on the subject, but I didn't think it necessary to say that I had grubbed at it for months together. I came away with Winston, who plunged at once into the Egyptian question, so I rounded on him and charged him with being more responsible than anyone for paralysing British policy. He took it good-humouredly, and said he had heard for the first time certain things that I told him. He said he had heard glowing accounts during his visit to America of our visit the previous year."

After a digression which the documents available seemed to impose, a return must be made to 1910. A letter in that year from the Home Office, whither Churchill had by this time removed, implied more than might at first sight appear, its purpose being to draw Spender's attention to a letter destined for an early issue of *The Times* over the signatures of F. E. Smith and Lord Robert Cecil on "the House of Lords and the political situation". The letter when it did appear pointed clearly to a coalition government of all parties, such as Lloyd George among others was privately advocating, and Churchill's note to Spender is a plain implication that he also was among the supporters of such a scheme.

Another letter to Spender from the Home Office, in January 1911,

dealt with a dramatic and warmly discussed episode, the appearance of the Home Secretary in person (and top hat) at Sidney Street, Stepney, where two alien murderers had fortified themselves in a dwelling-house, and were exchanging lively fusillades with the police, who, reinforced by soldiers, were endeavouring to secure them dead or alive. No one would have dreamed of finding any other Home Secretary "assisting", in the French sense, at such a battle; no one would have expected not to find this particular Home Secretary there. His action produced some acid criticisms, but the *Westminster* took another line, and in consequence of it he wrote to Spender: "Many thanks for your friendly note in to-day's *Westminster* about Stepney. *The Times* blamed me for stopping the soldiers going to Tonypandy [a mining centre in South Wales, where there were riots in the previous year] and now blames me for allowing them to go to Stepney, where I was appealed to by the authorities on the spot. Their doctrine is therefore apparently that soldiers should always be sent to shoot down British miners in Trade Disputes, but never to apprehend alien murderers engaged in crime."

Before the end of the same year this most versatile of Ministers had moved to the Admiralty, where life was diversified by the periodical penetration from outside of the rival views of Lord Fisher, the ex-First Sea Lord, and Lord Charles Beresford, the sailor-politician. Writing to Spender before he had been at the Admiralty a week the new First Lord makes reference to both his mentors, saying that as soon as he was appointed he wrote to both Fisher and Beresford asking them to come and see him, and that he had had useful conversations with both. Meanwhile Spender had been used as agent for transmitting to Churchill Fisher's dogmatic and insistent directions for the reconstitution of the Board of Admiralty. That is a story in itself, and it is told at length in a later chapter of this volume. The First Lord soon aligned himself with Fisher, and in August 1912 was writing to Spender stigmatising certain public statements by Beresford as "absolutely untrue".

During the war the correspondence seems to cease, though there was one lively oral argument over conscription in 1915. The next letter among Spender's papers, with one unimportant exception, is dated 8th April, 1919, Churchill being at this time Secretary for War. Spender had written to him about what he thought was some hardship involved in the delayed demobilisation of members of the Non-Combatant Corps, and Churchill, in replying, observes among other things that "the situation in Germany is very serious indeed,

and can only be relieved by food and raw materials". (This was at a time when the Peace Conference had run about half its course, and just a month after General Plumer, commanding the British Army of Occupation in Germany, had written to the Prime Minister urging that more food should be sent in). Other letters of the same year deal with statements in the *Westminster* on waste at the Government's Motor Depot at Slough and General Denikin's operations in Russia—and take exception to both. The second letter is lengthy, and constitutes a full exposition and defence of the policy which the Government, and in particular the Secretary for War, favoured at that moment, of supporting the "White" Russian Generals who had remained loyal to the British alliance throughout. It is notable, *inter alia*, for a reference to "the Democratic Constituent Assembly for All Russia which will be erected after the suppression of the Soviet Government", an expression of view which must of course in fairness be read against the background of 1919, not of 1945.

Then comes a further long gap. Spender soon after this lost the evening *Westminster*, and Churchill was temporarily out of office. When he returned it was as a Conservative, not a Liberal, Minister. There was therefore little to keep the two in touch. But contact was not finally broken. A correspondence which began with letters to the young Unionist Member for Oldham ended, in 1941, with one to the Prime Minister of Great Britain, bringing certain considerations bearing on public policy to his notice. The reply was brief, but in tone as unaffectedly friendly as ever.

Spender's chief friends in the greatest days of the *Westminster* and of the Liberal Party were members of the Liberal Cabinet—Asquith, Grey, Morley, Haldane, Fitzmaurice, Bryce, Crewe, Herbert Gladstone, McKenna—to whom should be added one important Liberal outside the House, Sir Robert Hudson, Secretary of the Liberal Federation, and one distinguished journalist, A. G. Gardiner, Editor of the *Daily News*, who has survived all the others except Crewe,* including Spender himself. Asquith was not a man of many intimates, but among the relatively few Spender held a high place. He was the only journalist who was always free of 10 Downing Street when Asquith was Prime Minister. But to Asquith, whose appraisal of men was unerring, and who knew the statesman-mind when he saw it, he was much more than a journalist; Lady Oxford, in a letter to *The Times* just after Spender's death, said that her husband was never satisfied that any important step he was

*Lord Crewe has died since this sentence was written.

taking was right till it had had the approval of Lord Crewe and of Spender. So far as Spender was concerned that statement is confirmed by various letters from Asquith himself, as, for example, one dated December 3rd 1909, from 10 Downing Street:

MY DEAR SPENDER,

I was very much gratified to receive your letter: you know what value I put on your judgment.

Yours ever,

H.H.A.

The earliest of the letters from Asquith among Spender's papers was concerned primarily with the correction of an inaccurate personal paragraph in the *Westminster*, but it went on: "May I add an expression of sincere admiration and gratitude for the manner in which, throughout the autumn, the *Westminster* has shown itself the ablest and most level-headed exponent of the best kind of Liberalism?"

Differences of opinion between Asquith and Spender were so rare that when one does occur it deserves to be recorded. One such case arose when Asquith expressed his amazement at Spender's endorsement of a doctrine promulgated by Morley to the effect that (as Asquith quoted it) "unless you have such a distribution of parties that the Irish have the casting vote the Irish representation (at least as regards Irish legislation) is ruled out! In other words, if we had a Liberal majority over both Tories and Irish its acts (*quoad* Ireland) would not have the same constitutional authority as if the distribution had been such that the Irish votes were needed to carry them into law. This is to my mind new doctrine with a vengeance."

One question put by Spender in 1912 elicited a reply which forms an interesting contribution to history. The *Manchester Guardian* had stated categorically in a leading article that the South African settlement was due to Campbell-Bannerman alone: "He won over his Cabinet, but without him it could not and would not have been done." Spender obviously had some doubts about the truth of that and asked Asquith for the facts. In reply Asquith wrote (on 15th June) from Downing Street:

"The notion that C.B. was opposed in the Cabinet, or 'won it over', in regard to the Transvaal settlement is a ridiculous fiction.

Between ourselves, he had little or nothing to do with the matter and never bothered his head about it. The Transvaal Constitution was worked out by myself, Loreburn [Lord Chancellor], Elgin [Secretary for the Colonies], Winston [Under-Secretary for the Colonies] and Sir R. Solomon [then Agent-General in London for the Transvaal] with the help of Lawson Walton [Attorney-General]. There was never the faintest difference of opinion about it in the Cabinet."

The assumption that C.B. was the chief author of the South African settlement has still sufficient currency to make this plain statement of the facts important. At the same time what Asquith wrote leaves it reasonable to believe that C.B. was convinced of the wisdom of giving self-government to South Africa, but little interested in the constitutional details. That the whole Cabinet was agreed throughout is made decisively clear by Asquith's letter.

Other letters from Asquith on various incidents of the moment, most of them of little consequence to-day, are spaced over a long term of years—the last of them being a moving acknowledgment of a resolution of the National Liberal Federation, forwarded by Spender, in 1926 on Asquith's (by that time Lord Oxford's) retirement from the leadership of the party. "I shall always treasure it," he wrote in a single sentence of impressive English, "as an expression of the confidence and goodwill of old and loyal comrades-in-arms who have never failed me, or let their own faith fail, either in the campaigns which have led us to victory, or in the searching ordeals of discouragement and temporary defeat which are the surest test of constancy and courage."

Beside that may be set a letter Spender himself wrote to Asquith on the same occasion:

"You may be sure that we shall still come to you for counsel and advice, and with the hope that when occasion offers you will still speak with the voice of authority to all Liberal-minded people. You must let me add on my own account that, looking back on my life, I count my association with you to have been a very rare privilege and happiness. As he goes along, the journalist comes to class public men as those with whom he can, and those with whom he cannot, have self-respecting relations; and to be able to acknowledge as chief a man of the highest eminence, who neither uses him nor prompts him, nor resents criticism nor asks for favour or flattery, is for him the very greatest good fortune. Many more important tributes will be paid to you, but it may be worth a little

niche in your memory that you helped to smooth the path and lighten the work of a Liberal editor."

But the friendship between Asquith and Spender was by no means wholly, or even primarily, political. There was the potent Balliol tie—Asquith was ten years senior to Spender at Oxford, but his reputation had survived him there—and in literature they found rich community of mind. Spender (in *Life, Journalism and Politics*) tells the story of an argument on the lawn at Mells one day in 1900, when, talking of a yew-tree close by, he quoted two lines from *In Memoriam*. Asquith declared flatly that they were not in *In Memoriam*, if indeed they were by Tennyson at all, adding that Spender had probably made them up himself. A volume of Tennyson was produced, and the lines verified. That seemed to end the matter, but a couple of days later the following letter came from 20 Cavendish Square:

> My Dear Spender,
>
> If you will look at any edition of *In Memoriam* prior to 1870 or thereabouts (mine, e.g., is the 19th edition, dated 1867) you will not find in it the poem now numbered xxxix ('old warden of these buried bones') in which the disputed lines occur. It must have been inserted between 1867 and 1870, with the result that, instead of there being, as before, cxxx poems, there are since the alteration cxxxi. I regretfully admit that the evidence compels me to withdraw the attribution to you of 'flower feeling after flower'. But I was right in maintaining that, if it came from the pen of the real Tennyson, it was an afterthought, and no part of the original *In Memoriam*. The 'Life'—a stupid book—throws no light upon the matter.
>
> Yours sincerely,
> H. H. Asquith.

A nice point nicely settled.

With all the Liberal leaders of 1906 Spender had, of course, been familiar in earlier days, when Liberals were in the wilderness, as well as with others, notably Rosebery, who in 1906 were no longer in the firing-line. Campbell-Bannerman he had known since 1898, and received much encouragement from him in connection with the *Westminster*, but death cut that friendship short in 1908. Morley he had known longest of all, being sent to him for advice as a young journalist as far back as 1886; Morley was consulted too about Spender's first book, on Old Age Pensions, in 1892, and, as has been

seen,* sent the writer an appreciative letter on its publication. From that time till Morley's death in 1923, when Spender indicated the length of their friendship by beginning a notable tribute in the *Weekly Westminster* with the words: "I first saw Lord Morley in the year 1886, and I have a letter on my table from him not three weeks old"—the two men were in close touch. It was, moreover, something of a family friendship, for Mrs. Spender and Morley's wife (of whom the world knew little) were sometimes of the party. But it was a relationship that had its strange aspects, for there were odd strains in Morley's character—vanity, which led him to take offence easily, and was no doubt the cause of his constant threats to resign office when he could not get all his will, and a curious jealousy even of persons for whom he had a sincere regard. Spender, who was following closely the same journalistic path that Morley had trodden himself, was more than once the object of this. In comparatively early days the journalist turned politician warned the younger journalist off politics or administration; he successfully prevented him from being appointed Ambassador at Washington after Bryce; and he emphatically disapproved of the choice of Spender as Campbell-Bannerman's biographer. None of this was a secret to Spender at the time, but he bore no malice, and in later life he could look back on it all philosophically. "As for honours and rewards," he wrote to Mrs. Spender some time in the middle twenties, "that was all over in 1914. None of my political friends since then have had anything to bestow, and for the time before that Morley was the man who blocked me. But suppose it had happened that I had had five years tenure of a Governorship or an Ambassadorship, what would have followed? I should have been out of the newspapers and left with a very small income and a title and the necessity of making up by guinea-pigging. I'm not at all sure I bear Morley a grudge, and perhaps after all I shall live longer if I am under the necessity of earning a living. It's the retired or well-endowed who seem to depart early."

One of the earliest of Morley's communications to the *Westminster* was anonymous, though a covering letter may have accompanied it; in any case the well-known handwriting was a signature in itself. The letter was dated 4th November 1898, and ran:

SIR,

You speak to-night of Lord Salisbury as about the only living example of a "resolute Cobdenite". I much suspect that in a

*p. 19.

humbler way I am another. But would you mind telling me precisely what a resolute Cobdenite *is*? Then I shall know where I am.

Yours faithfully,

M.P.

To this Spender appended an editorial note: "We must return to the definition another day; but perhaps another example may enable M.P. to understand himself meanwhile. We should say that Mr. John Morley also belongs to the same distinguished company."

In the early years of the century, before 1905 brought the Liberals into power and Morley into office, correspondence with Spender was mainly on the vexed topic of Liberal unity, for which Spender worked incessantly while Morley commented cynically. For example, in March 1900:

"Your endeavours to establish Liberal unity have never been surpassed since the man who composed the Athanasian Creed, whoever he was, and I watch them grimly."

In July 1901:

"I confess to watching that squalid comedy of the London restaurants* with considerable amusement. Yet, without affectation, I will say that it is rather pitiable to think of men of such powers squandering what ought to be a great national asset in this fashion."

In July 1902:

"These raws in a party, if they go on too long, become inveterate, as everybody knows. If the war had gone on it is conceivable that in the demand for a Man R. might at some moment have swept the country. But the war is over; and for the time he and all of us are down in the trough of the sea, and likely to remain there for a period of no short duration. Still, there is nothing to hinder us from becoming once more a reputable political party with the ordinary prospects and chances. J.C. won't live for ever; nor W.V.H. nor C.B. nor even J.M. We are all men who may drop off any year or any day—and must drop off

*For explanation of this reference see p. 107.

the perch tolerably soon. Surely with a view to a comprehensive succession to a valid party it is worth while to keep the asset in being."

Later India, and the Indian Councils Bill which Morley was introducing in 1909, fill the scene, and in 1910 Spender's counsel was effective in dissuading Morley, when he retired from the India Office, from retiring from the Government altogether. "I told the P.M. so," Morley wrote, "when I had my conversation with him on Tuesday. I said, and truly, that I had not thought of the general effects of my quitting the I.O. until you bore down on me with a pretty vehement exposition." In May 1911, having to reply for the Government in the House of Lords on the second reading of Lord Lansdowne's Bill for the reform of the Second Chamber, Morley writes to Spender that "a talk with you would be like silver and gold to me" and begs him to repair to Wimbledon for the purpose—which Spender (ready as always to supply ideas for someone else's benefit) did the day before the speech was made. Spender's visit to India in 1912 interested the ex-Secretary for India (he had retired from that office in 1910) considerably, and there were long conversations regarding it when the traveller got back.

Then, in August 1914, came a parting of the ways. Morley resigned from the Cabinet on the declaration of war with Germany, while Spender supported Asquith and Grey without hesitation or reserve. But he wrote Morley a letter worthy of friends who see themselves compelled to differ on a question vital to both, but resolve that in spite of it the friendship shall endure. Morley replied with deep feeling:

"Your letter is balm after two days that have been really *lacerating*. My nerve has been good, and I am firm in my conclusion as to my personal line, whether the general 'policy' is right or wrong. So I console myself for an isolation which is by no means splendid, by the hope that I have run my course and kept the faith. Meanwhile Hell must go on blazing in every quarter. I think of going into retreat for a space. When we can I shall rejoice at the thought of seeing Mrs. Spender and you.

Ever your friend,

J.M."

As the war developed the difference remained, but the determination to keep it in its place persisted. In declining an invitation from Spender to give some public address in March 1915 Morley writes:

[or]

"Your words go to my heart. I should be grieved beyond words if I had ever thought that the break in our talks meant anything like a breach in the friendship which has been such a pleasure (to both of us I do believe) for such a long time. For the moment our common ground on public things is broken to pieces. We don't speak the same language—nor do we journey along the same road. But Time—very reasonably short, I hope—will bring our little 'moratorium' to a welcome close. Meanwhile I hope you and Mrs. Spender will allow me to think and sign myself

Your affectionate friend,
M."

Time did, in fact, do its work—not that on Spender's side there was much work to do. In November 1917, Morley published his two volumes of *Recollections*, and in acknowledging a letter of Spender's regarding them he wrote:

"My keen enjoyment of your article was modified by contrition. I was only too well aware of your critical, anxious, responsible position in the midst of the grave distractions of last week. Never was there a week of greater bewilderment for a leading English publicist [the reference would appear to be to the Bolshevik Revolution], and how on earth you could spare free time and energy for my two bulky volumes of experiments in *belles lettres* passes my comprehension, practised journalists as we both are. Your appreciation of the book, both in the article and in your letter, has all the indulgence of an old friend. I am truly grateful to you, believe me. Don't think me negligent—but I am way-worn.

With sincere affection,
Yours always,
M."

Morley lived till 1923. To the end the friendship endured and the correspondence and personal contacts continued. In 1921 Spender wrote to his wife: "I had two hours, very affectionate and intimate, with J.M. yesterday. He asked a great deal after you and as I left said I was to repeat this message to you in the exact words: 'Give her my deepest homage and say we *must* be friends.' " As has been said, Morley's last letter to Spender was written three weeks before his death in 1923. The older man was then eighty-four, the

younger sixty. When they first met, thirty-seven years before, the difference in age—between forty-seven and twenty-three—was much more material.

It is neither practicable nor necessary to enter in detail into Spender's extensive correspondence with politicians in and outside the Cabinet in the fifteen or twenty years before the First German War. With Bryce the main topic was in the first instance the South African War (in which he took a peculiarly anxious interest as the result of a prolonged visit to South Africa in 1896), and later, when he was Ambassador at Washington, American affairs. He was very much dissatisfied with the news America was getting from newspaper correspondents in London and, thinking no doubt of news of America for Britain, he urged Spender to come out and see the United States for himself. That proved impracticable, but Bryce's letters, with their clear assessments of America's political and other problems, provided just the kind of guidance that a journalist writing constantly on American affairs would most appreciate. Meanwhile there was a rather voluminous correspondence with Lord Hugh Cecil on Education Bills; a more voluminous correspondence with Lord Cromer on Free Trade and other subjects; a little argument with Austen Chamberlain on what he thought a derogatory reference in the *Westminster* to his father, and numerous letters to and from Herbert Gladstone over a period of fully thirty years. One of the earliest of Gladstone's has its place among the many casual testimonies to Spender's political influence. It was written the day after Rosebery's Chesterfield speech in 1901 (with its exhortation to Liberals to "clean the slate"), and after praising the *Westminster's* leader on the subject goes on: "Here is a possible basis for an alternative government. But there are many dangers. You probably know C.B.'s mind as well as I do. It is plastic yet tenacious. I wish you would write to him or see him and urge that differences should be sunk. . . . He will attach great importance to your *personal* view over and above the *W.G.*"

The part played by Gladstone and Spender together in connection with the formation of Campbell-Bannerman's Government in 1905 has been described earlier in this chapter. After serving in that Government and its successor as Home Secretary till 1910 Gladstone went out to South Africa as Governor-General. Letters to Spender from there (like letters he used to get at a later date from Mr. Mackenzie King in Canada) provided useful guidance on the course of affairs in the Dominion. Some years later, in 1922, Gladstone is found pressing Spender to stand for Parliament and

attempting to move him from his firm refusal. "Of course," he writes, "we should pay your expenses with a most cheerful heart, and feeling solely that we were under overwhelming obligations to you." This was at the moment when the announcement of Spender's resignation of the editorship of the *Westminster*, on its change from an evening to a morning paper, had just been made. There is no sign that Spender ever regretted his decision against taking up Parliamentary life at close on sixty (though as one who has done that I think he might have found unsuspected pleasures in it).

Grey and Haldane were both among Spender's intimate friends, but he corresponded relatively little with them since he was so constantly seeing both of them in London. His letters to and from Grey belong mainly to the period when he was collaborating with Grey (owing to the latter's increasing blindness) in the preparation of *Twenty-five Years*, and deal chiefly with that subject. Discussions with Haldane touch sometimes on the eternal problem of Liberal unity, but more, after 1906, on the building up of the Territorial Force and other matters germane to Haldane's work at the War Office. On the former question a *Westminster* article evoked an interesting exposition of the fundamental function of the Territorials.

> "The object of a Territorial Army," the Secretary for War wrote in 1908, "must be to force an enemy to bring to his attempt at invasion an army so large that the defending navy cannot miss his transports. This tends to make the enemy give up the mere attempt to bring his navy to equality with the defending navy. For nothing but complete command of the sea will suffice to make invasion possible if the invading force must be very large in order to succeed. As artillery is always a fundamental obstacle, the possession of a very large artillery force becomes specially important, for counter-artillery is just what the enemy will find most difficult to transport."

Of another *Westminster* article in 1911 Haldane wrote "none of us carry weight as you do when you write like you have to-day," and a letter of April 1914 ran:

> "I have just finished reading through—'uno flatu'—your little book on the foundations of our policy [a reprint of some Westminster articles]. I think it is admirable, and I am ordering copies for the General Staff and the Staff College. It is far the best

exposition of the principles and objectives of British strategy that has appeared of late years, and should make people think."

Such was the assessment of Spender and his work by one sound judge.

Two letters of Spender's to prominent members of Asquith's Government deserve a place here for different reasons. One is an admirable example of his power of marshalling convincing arguments, the other indicates strikingly his independence as a journalist. In 1909, when the eight-Dreadnought controversy was raging, Mr. Lloyd George, with whom Spender never had very close relations, though he admired his social zeal and (with some reservations) his power of managing men, proposed as a compromise that the estimates should provide in the first instance for four ships, on the understanding that two more should be laid down if the situation required it. On that Spender wrote on 18th February 1909:

MY DEAR GEORGE,

I have been reflecting on your proposed compromise, but I am afraid I can only say that my objections to it are as grave as ever. Under your scheme you could only justify the laying-down of the two extra ships in the autumn (without Parliamentary powers taken or money voted) as an emergency measure, comparable to martial law, i.e. a genuinely unforeseen necessity, for which an indemnity must be obtained after the event. If you foresee the emergency as reasonably probable you must take Parliamentary powers in advance. That *must* be the constitutional doctrine, and if so the Minister who told the House (1) that he foresaw the event (2) that he did not propose to ask for money for it (3) that he proposed to take *carte blanche* without consulting the House when it arose, would expose himself to the most smashing retort. A *Liberal* party which respected the House of Commons would surely dislike this much more than having the bigger programme all at once. Honestly I can't conceive you as a Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer making yourself party to this proposal.

But common sense and statesmanship seem to me equally at war with it. Surely it would proclaim itself at once as a transparent shuffle, which would convict the Government openly of disingenuousness and lack of courage. I don't believe the Radicals would say thank you for it, and a large number of the rest would

greatly resent it. Then think of the effect in Europe if you told the House of Commons, as you would have to, that you were going to hold an inquest into Germany's proceedings between now and next September, and if when September came the ships were laid down as the result of this inquest. In that case you would barely escape a panic on the subject of Germany, and in the interval your dealings with Germany would be inconceivably complicated. Honestly I have tried to think of it, but I cannot imagine any Government committing itself to this course.

Nor can I imagine Ministers resigning on an issue so narrow as that which you and Winston put to me on Monday. You think, as I understand you, that there is a strong probability that the ships will have to be built, and you don't really think that your colleagues are plunging recklessly into aggressive shipbuilding. But the strong probability can only be handled in one way with due regard to the rights of the House of Commons, and that is by getting the vote for all six [ships], while pledging yourselves not to lay down the last two if circumstances prove them to be unnecessary. To consent to this cannot in my view be a "surrender" on your part, if you admit even a reasonable probability, for given that admission there is constitutionally no other course. You may be right in saying that if the money is once voted the Admirals are not likely to give it back. Perhaps not, but even so it is far better that the Admirals should be in a position to spend a little too much than that the whole constitutional machine should be thrown out of gear in the attempt to prevent them. If you resigned you could not possibly take these points of procedure; you would have to stake your own opinion against the rest of your colleagues and the Admiralty that the vote was excessive.

But, my dear George, I do earnestly beg you, having reduced the question to such a narrow point, not to contemplate any of these upheavals. You and Winston are wrong in talking or thinking as if your remaining with the Government would be a "surrender". There can be no question of that kind, and if any ill-natured suggestion of that kind is made you will have no stauncher defender than myself.

Ever yours,

J.A.S.

Perhaps you will kindly show this to Winston.

The second letter is to Mr. (now Lord) Runciman, who when

President of the Board of Education took exception to a leader of Spender's on a departmental circular which, though it was marked confidential, was brought before Parliament by a Member. On this Spender wrote:

DEAR RUNCIMAN,

The position of an editor with a soul of his own would be more difficult than it is if every criticism that he made of a public man was to be taken as evidence of personal unfriendliness. The comment made in the *Westminster* to-day was scrupulously fair, and courteous to yourself, though it expressed a view from which you naturally dissent.

There is to my mind the broadest possible distinction between intercepted documents dealing with matters which in the public interest ought to be kept secret and the circular of your Inspector. In the first case the Official Secrets Act might properly be applied, and apart from penalties the revelation would be open to the severest censure. But it seems to me quite impossible to apply this doctrine to a circular which has been issued to a hundred inspectors, and the revelation of which, though awkward for the Minister and the Government, touches no public interest. You may penalise any inspector who has betrayed you, but I think you run metaphor very hard when you brand as "a receiver of stolen goods" a Member of Parliament who brings to the notice of the House the fact that such a circular has been issued in such a way. The issue of such a circular cannot in my opinion be confidential in any sense that touches the honour of a Member of Parliament, for he has a perfect right to argue that such a document ought not to be sent out to the Inspectorate under the cloak of confidence, and that it cannot on this plea be withdrawn from the consideration of the House.

As for the moral, I confess myself impenitent. The circular does seem to me to be a question of policy, and I hope still that the Chief Inspector will somehow be prevented in future from issuing documents of this kind without the knowledge of the President of the Board. It puzzles me that the expression of this hope should be thought unfriendly either to the President or to the Government.

I hope I am as scrupulous about confidential documents as most people, but it does seem to me very important that the word 'confidential' should not be applied to things or circumstances which in their nature cannot be confidential, or we shall

lose the true meaning and value of the word. That the Chief Inspector should be able to use his position and influence for this particular view, and to bar reprisals on the ground that his opinions are confidential, does not seem to me fair, and I don't think the Department must complain of criticism if its servant and agent has acted in this way.

You may agree or not agree with me, but I cannot see any ground of complaint in the honest expression of these views.

Yours sincerely,

J. A. SPENDER.

There is matter here, as in so much that Spender wrote, that would form an invaluable contribution to a journalist's enchiridion.

CHAPTER VIII

REASONINGS WITH ROSEBERY

NOTHING testifies more strikingly to the position Spender held in the councils of the nation, as well as of a party, than the intimacy of his relationship with the three Liberal Prime Ministers who held office between 1894 and 1916. Of two of them, Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith, he was the biographer. Lord Rosebery he knew only after the defeat and fall of the Liberal Government in June 1895, the first letter in a singularly interesting correspondence being dated October 1st in that year. It refers to a conversation at dinner the previous evening, and since it opens with the formal "My dear Sir", it would seem to mark the starting-point of the acquaintance between the Liberal Prime Minister and the Liberal journalist. The next letter is to "My dear Mr. Spender", the third to "My dear Spender", which thereafter alternated only with the rather more frequent "My dear S.".

Rosebery's letters (with one or two important exceptions Spender's have not been preserved, but their nature can often be inferred from the replies they evoked) are by no means all political. Some are brief but cordial invitations to dinner or a week-end visit. For example:

19th May 1904.
38 Berkeley Square, W.

I am off to the Durdans to-night for Whitsuntide. If you and Mrs. Spender want to see the blossom and breathe the air of heaven you will know where to come.

A.R.*

You have only to telegraph
Well-aired beds
Obliging manager

or,

4th February 1908.
38 Berkeley Square, W.

My Dear S.,

The P. of Wales dines here on Monday at 8.15 to meet a few men. Please come.

Sincerely,
R.

An attractive variant was elicited by an unwonted incursion on Spender's part into that racing milieu in which Rosebery shone so conspicuously. Fired by the fact that the Rosebery entrant for Derby of 1905 was called Cicero, Spender expressed encouragement in advance in a set of elegiacs which he considerately, if unnecessarily, rendered at the same time into English verse. They, and their translation, ran as follows:

THE XVth PHILIPPIC

O felix nimium, Tulli, tua si bona noris;
Laude tuum victor nomen adornat equus;
Acceditque tuis suprema Philippica, famam
Languentem nostris quae recreare queat.

ON THE VICTORY OF CICERO

Thrice happy Tully if your luck you know—
A Derby winner glorifies your name,
One last Philippic adds to yours, and so
Renews at length your sadly waning fame.

*Lord Rosebery's usual signature took the form of an interesting hieroglyphic which appears sometimes to have represented R (Rosebery), or AR (Archibald Rosebery) or possibly AP (Archibald Primrose).

This is neat, and it is satisfactory that the event justified the prediction, for in Cicero Rosebery did in fact find his third Derby winner. But Spender had apparently in the letter accompanying the verses suggested a date for another of the walks that he and Rosebery often took together—usually in Kensington Gardens.* That explains the brief but sufficient communication in which Rosebery acknowledged the composition:

June 5/05
38 Berkeley Square, W.

MY DEAR SPENDER,

The classical nicety of your congratulations almost obliterates the fact that you have suggested the moment of the Derby as a proper time for a walk in Kensington Gardens.

Yours,
R.

Spender knew that a horse called Cicero was running; he no doubt knew where (was it Bishop Westcott who said that though he had never seen the Derby he had once passed through Derby station while the race was actually being run?), but his knowledge does not seem to have extended to when.

One other letter which falls into no special category forms a tribute so warm, and from so competent and candid a critic, that it would be an injustice to Spender's memory to omit it. Dated 25th February 1899 from The Durdans, it reads:

MY DEAR SPENDER,

I rarely touch on your articles, or venture to criticise or commend them. But I must be allowed to make an exception and express my strong sense of the excellence—I might almost say perfection—of that of to-day.

Yours sincerely,
R.

Spender had at this time been editor of the *Westminster* just over three years. The leader in question is printed in full, in an appendix on page 231 of this volume.

* Among the hours which I should most like to live over again are those spent in walks and talks with Rosebery, which were of weekly occurrence during the summer months in London."—*Life, Journalism and Politics*, I, 64.

What appears to be one of the last letters Spender received from Rosebery indicated plainly the special relationship which existed between the two men. Brief as it is, it stands for a good deal:

The Durdans, Epsom.
Feb. 16th 1922.

MY DEAR SPENDER,

I see with sincere regret that you are giving up the *Westminster Gazette*. I don't take much interest in journalism, and you are the only journalist in whom I do take an interest. I daresay you will be happier in retirement, as the change from an evening to morning paper is too drastic. You will now be absorbed in C.B.*

Yours ever,
R.

Rosebery was not, in fact, quite as indifferent to journalism as (like various other politicians) he affected to be, but his attitude to his journalistic friends—or, perhaps more accurately, his only journalistic friend—was uniformly honourable. "The relations of public men and journalists," Spender writes, "are liable to the suspicion of motives on both sides, but Lord Rosebery was as nearly perfect in that relation as any public man I was ever thrown in with. In the eleven years from this time [1895] onwards I was much in his always delightful society, but he never asked me to do him a service as a journalist and never resented my criticisms, which were frequent and outspoken during a considerable part of this time. He was supposed to be sensitive to newspaper criticism, but if so he concealed it with admirable fortitude so far as I was concerned."† It may be questioned, indeed, (in spite of some of the letters hereafter to be quoted) whether Rosebery did care so much about what the papers said. At any rate he paid small attention to their criticism or counsel. "He was," Spender affirms in the same chapter, "the most uninfluenceable of men. Time after time I have left him, thinking that possibly I had made some impression on him, only to discover a few days later that he had done the one thing that I had urged him most strongly not to do. Then I would lose my patience and fling out at him in the *Westminster*, but it made no difference. He would ask me to come again, smile at my disappointment and displeasure, and be his old charming self, talking of Napoleon and

*The Life of Campbell-Bannerman, published in 1923.

†*Life, Journalism and Politics*, i, 64, 65.

Pitt and Horace Walpole, and telling stories of Dizzy and Mr. Gladstone."

There were no doubt various questions on which Spender endeavoured to influence Rosebery, but one was perennial and predominant—the position of the only ex-Premier (after Gladstone's death in 1898) in the Liberal Party. There is no need to trace here Lord Rosebery's political evolution down to 1895—the year in which his Government resigned office, in which Spender met him for the first time and in which Spender was appointed Editor of the *Westminster*. He had acquired a leading position in the party in 1880 as result of the part he took in organising Gladstone's famous Midlothian campaign, with Dalmeny House as the Liberal leader's headquarters, and in 1885, after a visit to Australia, he developed views which led him at the General Election of the following year to declare himself a "Liberal Imperialist". It was not till seventeen years later, in 1902, that the Liberal Imperialists founded the Liberal League to give expression to their views, but it was the opposition between Rosebery's Imperialist and Harcourt's more insular outlook, as well as personal rivalry and incompatibility, that was responsible for most of the unfortunate strains and dissensions that racked the party between the defeat of one Liberal Government in 1895 and the formation of the next just over ten years later.

Through all those years Spender was striving ceaselessly, both through personal contacts and through the *Westminster*, to effect unity in the Liberal Party, and it was on Rosebery, with whom he was much more intimate than with Harcourt, that his influence was mainly brought to bear. The correspondence on that subject begins on October 13th 1896. Four days earlier, on October 9th, Rosebery announced publicly, what he had already conveyed to the Liberal Chief Whip, Tom Ellis, his resignation of the post of leader of the Liberal Party. Spender naturally wrote a leader in the *Westminster* on the subject, in which he fully approved (how consistent this with his attitude forty years later) Rosebery's insistence, in relation to the Liberal Party and the Armenian massacres, that it was fatal to make demands that would plainly involve war when neither the country nor the party was prepared to go to war. But that was only half, and the less important half, of the subject-matter of Rosebery's speech. The vital question was his resignation of the leadership. In that Spender reluctantly acquiesced, accepting Rosebery's submission that the position of a leader in the Lords was impossible unless he stood in an almost abnormally cordial relationship with the leader in the Commons—as cordial (as

Spender put it) as subsisted between Salisbury and Balfour. Since that relationship notoriously did not exist between Rosebery and Harcourt there was nothing for it, the *Westminster* conceded, but for Rosebery to step down, at any rate temporarily, leaving Harcourt in apparent possession of the reversion. (In the end it was C.B. who succeeded, but Spender could not foresee that.)

As a result of the leader there came from Rosebery this:

Newmarket,
October 13th 1896.

My Dear Spender,

I was too tired and too shy to say what I wished to say yesterday. Let me send a line of thanks to you, then, for your constant and able support of me through these arduous times. I shall always think of you as a friend—whatever the future may have in store.

Always yours sincerely,
R.

Would you send me six copies of last Saturday's *Westminster*? [the issue containing the leader quoted above]? It was the only thing that almost persuaded me I had made a fairly good speech.

Less than a month later the Harcourt argument began. The *Westminster* had quoted in its London Letter a story from *Truth* (at that time still edited by Labouchere) to the effect that in the late Liberal Government, of which Rosebery was the head while Harcourt led in the House of Commons, the policy and tactics of the Cabinet were not Harcourt's except in the matter of the increase of the Death Duties, which he was only allowed to insert in his Budget when he threatened resignation. On that Rosebery comments with some asperity in a letter to Spender from Dalmeny dated November 8th:

"The tactics of the Cabinet, in the House of Commons, were carried on without the slightest reference to the Prime Minister [Rosebery himself], and with very little reference to the Cabinet; and as regards the increases in the Death Duties, they were announced before Mr. Gladstone resigned, were never subject to correction or even criticism, except in matters of detail, and were allowed by the Cabinet to occupy, through dilatory management, the entire session."

Such was the prevailing atmosphere in Rosebery's only Cabinet.

Another letter followed almost immediately. Spender, it is clear, had made, regarding the relationship of the Liberal leaders, or leading Liberals, an observation from which Rosebery dissented.

> "As to your last paragraph," he wrote, (from Dalmeny on 17th November 1896) "the first positive move came from Goliath [Harcourt] when he dissociated himself from my policy at the election. When Marshall says, 'These are the silks I recommend', and Snelgrove says, 'Marshall's silks are shoddy' the partnership is *ipso facto* dissolved. All that has to follow is legal formality. Of course, as you say, 'the same blow struck others who started the competing causes' (I suppose you mean policies). But none of them was my direct agent and partner, my sole recognised mouthpiece in the House of Commons. Moreover I have not associated politically with these competing politicians since the General Election."

The next of the extant letters, dated two and a half years later, deals with party differences in a more equable spirit—as befitted its geographical origin. Its author was on a yachting tour in the Mediterranean, and devoted Palm Sunday of 1899, at Zante, one of the Ionian islands, to putting on paper various reflections for Spender's benefit.

"My main impressions abroad" he writes, "have been:

(1) That while London is, Constantinople was intended by the Creator to be, the capital of the world.

(2) That Herschell's* death is the greatest blow that the Liberal Party, if ever to form a government, has sustained for many years, in spite of the loss of countless leaders by resignation, correspondence or otherwise.

(3) That in yachting a strong headwind is the only positive certainty. Consequently I have spent much time in quiet havens, only a trifle astonished never to meet in any of them any other musty and retired leaders. But as I am hoping to proceed straight from this to Naples I may very probably meet there the true Defender of the Faith, who was, when I last heard of him, musing in the

*Lord Herschell had been Lord Chancellor in Gladstone's brief administration in 1886 and throughout the Gladstone-Rosebery government 1892–95.

Forum*, musing no doubt on the stabs of the envious Casca and the well-beloved Brutus."

(Rosebery took a sardonic pleasure in satirical comment on the condition of the party he had so recently led. Just after this, at a dinner to the retiring Viceroy of India, Lord Elgin, he observed that this former Liberal Minister had returned to find his party "disheartened by a superfluity of retired leaders", and in a note to Spender on 25th November of the same year (1899), referring to the termination of H. W. Massingham's editorship of the *Daily Chronicle*, he remarks: "So I see the *Chronicle* is once more headless. It sheds its chiefs almost as often as the Liberal Party.")

Shortly after the traveller's return to England another letter arrived. On 5th May Rosebery had addressed a dinner at the City Liberal Club, and from his detached vantage-point adjured the party to get back to its pre-1886, *i.e.* pre-Home Rule, position and find means to combine the Imperial with the Liberal outlook. Though he took the opportunity for a hit at Morley it was Harcourt—equally the object of the advice to reconstitute the party—who replied twenty-four hours later. Spender naturally wrote a leader on the City speech, dealing in notably mild terms with Rosebery's manifestly provocative utterance. It assumed (with doubtful validity) that Rosebery did not desire to eliminate Irish Home Rule altogether from the Liberal programme, and called on him to help in discovering a solution consonant with his own Imperialistic views. The leader concluded with an appeal for Liberal unity, prefaced by the quotation of a sagacious remark of John Stuart Mill's, to the effect that it was essential that extreme opinions should be well heard in this country, since the habit of regarding every step in politics as a mean between two extremes was so ingrained in the British public that without them even moderate reforms would be impossible.

These comments Spender followed up with a private letter. Rosebery replied from The Durdans on May 10th:

MY DEAR S.,

Many thanks for your letter. I don't say that your article was too apologetic from a tactical point of view, but only from mine. From my point of view there is nothing in that speech to explain

*Harcourt had in fact written home to Morley a few weeks earlier: "The real old Rome entrances me; the Capitol, the Forum and the Palatine are 'all my fancy painted'."

or retract—nor will I: not though old Bombastes burst his cheeks! I see from the *Daily News* that papers like the *Leeds Mercury* and *Sheffield Independent* have found him out. May you live till I answer or notice him!

Yours,

R.

Most of the occasional letters scattered over the next six years deal with one aspect or another of the question of Liberal unity—in pursuit of which Spender displayed a zeal which Rosebery thought sometimes excessive. However, the first reference to the subject is in light enough vein. F. C. G. had drawn a famous cartoon in the *Westminster* showing various Liberal chiefs endeavouring to row the Liberal boat in opposite directions—Harcourt and Morley against Rosebery. Apropos of this Rosebery writes: "Am I such a blear-eyed brute as I appear in Gould's cartoon? Any decent mariner would shove off at the mere appearance of such a grog-blossom. And do Harcourt and Morley really work so hard as Gould represents?" Having said so much, over the usual signature "Yours, A. R.", the critic adds a postscript: "Don't let these light-hearted quips make you think I disparage the cartoon—it is excellent, and I am far more beautiful than I deserve."

But a few weeks later, on 14th November, a letter satirical in form but more serious in substance arrived from Dalmeny—on an article of Spender's on the eternal question of Liberal unity, not in the *Westminster* but in the *Contemporary Review*, which offered greater scope in the matter of length.

My Dear Spender (it ran),

I have at last come across your outpouring in the *Contemporary*. It is, as it could not fail to be, very clever, particularly that part which relates to the iniquity of the dissolution. I do not, indeed, agree with that portion of the article which relates to myself. As you know, it is in the teeth of all my views of and for myself. But as I seem to have become a Universal Cockshy my opinion is of the less moment. For the U.C. cannot know as much about himself as those who make him a target. His only course is to remain meekly and gratefully quiescent.

You certainly fight gallantly for Union; sometimes I think with an unreasoning courage. But, there again, a U.C. should have no opinions. How can he know? All he can gather is that the cause of unity is enshrined in the too select club presided over

by George Russell* at St. Ermin's Mansions—and to hell with the Lib. Imps.

Bearing this olive-leaf in her beak the dove of peace will, I infer, soon revisit the Liberal Ark and harmonise its multifarious occupants. May I be there (or in the neighbourhood, say on a kopje of Ararat) to see.

Yours sincerely,
A. R.

This was amusing enough badinage; the next letter dealt with the problem of schism more seriously. This time, moreover, the dissension was not between Rosebery and Harcourt, but between Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman, who had become the official leader of the party at the beginning of 1899. In June 1901 the National Reform Union, a definitely left-wing body, entertained Campbell-Bannerman at a luncheon at the Holborn Restaurant; both Harcourt and Morley were of the company. In his speech C. B. dealt with the Boer War, which was then in its protracted closing stages, and, denouncing those who were demanding "unconditional surrender" worked his argument up to the now historic question and answer: "When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa." It is not surprising that this should prove too much for Rosebery, who was at the moment rusticating at Gastein. He was getting abundance of rain and snow; he was also getting some English papers, and on June 20th he sent a reply to a letter of Spender's which had clearly, in his view, treated the C. B. luncheon too indulgently.

"Perhaps it is climatic conditions," he observed with some severity, "that chill my sense of humour. But I see nothing funny in the proceedings at the Holborn Casino. Nor, I think, did the *Westminster* of the next day. To me that banquet is a sinister event. There was nothing unforeseen and unexpected about it. C. B. knew exactly who he would meet, and met them. Moreover, he made them a speech such as they might have made themselves. I do not see therefore how a schism can be avoided. Indeed I think it must have been in the minds of the organisers of the banquet to bring one about. But frankly I am no longer quite sure what side you take in this business. I will not write more, lest I afflict you."

*The Right Hon. G.W. E. Russell.

Then, after an appeal for more letters, which "besides being a charity to a hermit in a wilderness, are a delight to a faithful friend", comes a postscript: "You are lucky to be allowed to 'love J. M.'. No one loved him more sincerely than I, and I have no idea why the pleasure is no longer permitted to me."

How completely these sentiments represented Rosebery's considered views was demonstrated when, immediately on his return from Gastein, he went to the City Liberal Club and delivered a speech containing the famous declaration, "For the present at any rate I must proceed alone. I must plough my furrow alone." That, it might be supposed—particularly when the speaker made it clear that he could "remain very contented in the society of my books and my home"—would eliminate one at least of the party's complications. But events by no means worked out that way. Rosebery did not relapse into study and silence, and between the "methods of barbarism" and "ploughing alone" era and the Liberal Party's triumphant return to power at the beginning of 1906 Spender felt impelled to make one abnormal effort to reduce dissidence to unity. But that was not till late in 1904. Three years earlier, in November 1901, Rosebery was to make a speech, destined to become a political landmark, at Chesterfield. Spender wrote asking for some line on the speech in advance, and got no more illuminating reply than that "the part of a true friend would be to damp down expectations".

But expectations were not damped down; whether they were satisfied is another matter. Most of the speech was devoted to national questions, but its opening passages consisted of adjurations to "men who sit still with the fly-blown phylacteries of obsolete policies bound round their foreheads,"* to "clean the slate", discard discredited programmes and evolve policies adapted to the needs of the present and the future; that meant (like the speech of May 1899 to the City Liberal Club) the abandonment of Home Rule in particular.

The Chesterfield speech made the prospects of Liberal reunion more remote than ever, and the fissure between the right and the left of the party was still further widened by the formation, in March 1902, of the Liberal League, to express the views of Liberal Imperialists, with Rosebery as President and Asquith and Grey

*On this C.B. wrote to Herbert Gladstone: "What is a 'fly-blown phylactery'? Fly-blow is the result of a fly laying the egg from which maggots come in meat; no fly out of Bedlam would choose a phylactery (if he found one) for such a purpose."—Spender, *Life of Campbell-Bannerman*, ii, 14.

among the vice-presidents. At intervals in the next year or two Campbell-Bannerman made studiously conciliatory speeches, but to no purpose, and in 1904, with the Conservative Government, split in two by Chamberlain's Imperial Preference campaign, obviously tottering to a fall, Spender determined to try the effect of a strong personal appeal to Rosebery. A good deal underlay his resolve. His representations came from his heart. He might well have made them spontaneously in any case. But in fact they had notable inspiration. In October 1904 he received a letter from Lord Esher (who was at that time nominally Permanent Secretary of the Office of Works, but held a unique position in Court circles) dated from Balmoral, and of course marked private. Its purpose was clear.

"My dear Spender," Esher wrote, in a series of staccato sentences spaced out in short paragraphs:
"what changes. . . .
"Poor dear old Harcourt gone for ever from the councils of the Party.
"Lord Spencer finished.
"A. J. B. embarking on a new policy (action) with a moribund Parliament and administration.
"All this is very serious.
"But the *most* serious thing of all is the unconstitutional position of Rosebery.
"If he attacks the Government, and leads the attack, which he is doing, he is bound *in honour* to take up the responsibilities of office.
"For all our sakes see to this.
"You really must *now* arrange a *modus vivendi* under which he and C. B. can combine. No one but you can do it.
Yours ever, Esher."

Such an appeal was not only flattering but compelling. And there was a stronger reason still for responding. On the back of Spender's manuscript copy of the letter he addressed to Rosebery he has pencilled a note: "Esher's letter, which started it, was prompted by King Edward". Whether Spender knew this at the time, or only learned it afterwards, is not clear—probably the former. His letter, like every other appeal to Rosebery, was ineffectual, but in view of its potential value, and incidentally as evidence of the freedom of address he felt entitled to assume, it deserves quotation.

"Dear Lord Rosebery," Spender wrote, on October 22nd, 1904, from his private address, 45 Sloane Street:

"I remember once writing you a letter which you said was 'in the manner of a Bishop addressing a catechumen'—rather a painful answer to a humble enquirer. All the same I am tempted —not to ask questions but just to put down a few notes and queries which have occurred to me during the last few days.

Week by week one question grows more persistent in the letter-bag of the *Westminster Gazette*: What is Lord Rosebery going to do? Harcourt dead, Spencer very ill, C. B. professing always not to desire the chief place and to be willing to work with everybody. Somebody asked me the other day to describe Lord Rosebery's present position. I answered 'he is stronger with the public and with the rank-and-file of the Liberal party than at any time during the last nine years; he is more isolated from the Front Bench than at any moment during the same period'. His fault or theirs? Neither's so far—but his own group, Asquith, Grey etc., have been drawn back into the official party by the necessity of fighting Joseph Chamberlain, and the Liberal League, which was founded on the politics of three years ago, has lost its reason for existing. When founded, its strength lay in the presumption that its principal members would act together on the formation of a Liberal Government. That presumption has gone, because all its principal members—except one—have given the public to understand that they will join any Liberal Government for the defence of Free Trade. J. C., in fact, has raised the one question in all politics which obliterates —at least for the time being—the original politics of the Liberal League.

It does not follow from this that the Liberal League should be disbanded, or anything sensational done to it, but it does follow surely that it is not a good enough organisation for Lord Rosebery, and that if all his friends make their peace with Spencer and C. B., while he alone remains aloof, this may set up a fatal mechanical obstacle to his return to power, which would otherwise follow as a matter of course.

I don't forget that you have over and over again told me that you were *hors concours* in this matter, and if it were only a question of personal rivalries and competitions there would be nothing to say except that you were very wise. But events will compel you—are compelling you—to take a leading part in the fight with the Government and J. C. Your type of Imperialism and

J. C.'s are becoming sharply defined as the alternatives in the public mind, and you cannot go on with the attack and then step aside and decline the responsibility. I am sure there is a very strong feeling on that subject, and if anything could damage you it would be a doubt about it.

Hasn't the time come for some plain intimation that you accept the responsibility, such as Mr. Gladstone gave in the last months of the Midlothian campaign? If this were forthcoming party men and party journalists would be relieved of much embarrassment. So long as you are supposed to stand aloof or to be hostile, support of you lays them under the suspicion of intriguing against C. B., Spencer and the official people. And yet when you are taking the most effective lead and making the best speeches it is absurd to have to treat you as detached from the main army. A very few words from you in a public speech would set all this right and throw upon other people the burden of being hostile to you if they wished or dared, as they wouldn't. As for the official people, their complaint is perpetually that you won't see them or won't talk politics with them or take any part with them in the House of Lords. Lord Spencer in August and Bobbie Spencer last week repeated all this to me at much length. Perhaps it is not true, or only half true, but that they say it so freely and make such complaint about it increases the embarrassment of the ordinary party man who wants to be friendly to you without giving offence to them.

I see I am gradually slipping into the episcopal style—so here I pull up. This letter is purely selfish on my part. I want to see J. C. beaten by a thumping majority, and I think it will happen *if* you are definitely with the party before an election, but not otherwise. That my private and personal feelings lead me greatly to desire that this 'if' should become fact you know; and since you know you will forgive this letter.

Yours ever sincerely,

J. A. SPENDER."

It must have taken some obduracy to resist such an appeal, but Rosebery had plenty of that on occasion. He did not reply to the letter in writing. Or rather, he did write a reply but did not send it. He explained that in a talk with Spender ten days or so after the despatch of the latter's adjuration; Spender kept a record of the conversation. "Lunched with Lord R. to-day," he wrote; "drove with him to the City, where he was going to attend a Milton mem-

orial meeting and, our talk being unfinished, arranged to go back to Berkeley Square at five-thirty. Remained talking about my letter from five-thirty to seven. R. quite uncompromising, 'denies my premises, rejects my conclusion.' Showed me a long letter (three pages this size) which he had written to me in answer to my letter but 'suppressed'; let me read it, then took it back and locked it away. The substance of it was that he was without support in the country, and in the House of Commons had only 26 members behind him. The press, with the solitary exception of the *Leeds Mercury*, was hostile, whether Liberal or Conservative. The *Westminster Gazette* might be called 'cold-bloodedly neutral'. In such circumstances he could not form a Government which would live or do any good. Being in the House of Lords, he could only be Prime Minister if he had in an *exceptional degree* the support of the party, and there was not the smallest ground for supposing that it would be given him. As to his responsibility, he was absolved by the action of the Liberal leaders themselves. He had made his overtures at the time of the Chesterfield speech and later, and they had been rejected. The next Government would no doubt be a Government for the defence of Free Trade, but it must also have a positive policy, and the Liberal leaders had declared their dissent from his ideas on that subject. His position would be worse than in 1894 if he attempted to form a Government in these circumstances. Therefore he would make no such declaration as I suggested. He would, however, work for Free Trade and give an independent support to any Liberal Government that might be formed. He repeated this with more vehemence in conversation. I said the result of this aloofness would be probably that the Liberal Party would get a small and not a clear and independent majority at the election, and that thus the cause which he declared to be vitally important would be in danger."

There is nothing to show whether that was the end of the episode or not. It must be remembered that the Liberal ex-Premier and the Liberal editor regularly walked and talked together every week when both were in town; their correspondence was therefore limited in volume, being confined to occasions when Rosebery was at Dalmeny or the Durdans or Mentmore or abroad. But it is clear that on the fundamental political issue there was no rapprochement. The only other consecutive series of letters that has survived centres round Rosebery's Bodmin speech of November 1905—on the eve of the General Election—devoted once more to accentuating the divergence of outlook between him and Campbell-

Bannerman, the accredited leader of the party. It was the old Home Rule issue still. C. B., speaking at Stirling a few days before, had observed that in the unlikely event of his being consulted by the Irish Nationalists regarding their policy, he would advise them to accept Home Rule by instalments in any way they could get it, provided always that each instalment was obviously a step towards the ultimate goal. A statement so temperate might well seem to extreme Radicals almost a betrayal of Gladstone's memory. It affected Rosebery very differently, stirring him to the immediate and vigorous declaration that "emphatically and explicitly and once for all I cannot serve under that banner". None of Rosebery's Liberal League colleagues interpreted the Stirling speech as he had done; indeed all four vice-presidents of the League, Asquith, Grey, Haldane and Fowler, accepted office in the Government which Campbell-Bannerman was about to form. Spender contested Rosebery's reading of C. B.'s words, but, as four separate letters from Rosebery in the course of December show, without making the smallest semblance of impression. All of them insist that if C. B. did not mean what Rosebery assumed him to mean it is incumbent on him to say so.

> "Such poor brains as I possess," runs one dated St. Andrew's Day [November 30th] 1905 and written during a Board meeting of the Great Northern Railway, "compel me to the interpretation of C. B.'s speech that I announced publicly at Bodmin. I cannot say that I have found any fresh interpretation, and so I can say nothing. I was quite aware when I made it that the blame would be laid on me, but I am quite accustomed to that. . . . I cannot say anything. I cannot say that my interpretation is wrong, for I have no reason to think so. The only person who can say that my interpretation is wrong is the orator himself."

Asquith and Grey, as has been said, were perfectly satisfied with the Stirling speech, but the day after his St. Andrew's Day letter Rosebery sent Spender another, insisting that C. B. must say publicly whether his two Ministers (as they had now become) have interpreted him correctly or not.

> "It is clear," he writes, "that I cannot accept their explanation of his words when he speaks constantly and declines to confirm them. My reason explains his speech one way, their reason ex-

plains it another—only he can decide which is right. Certainly not

Yours always,
A. R.

A week later the same thing is repeated from Dalmeny in other words.

My Dear S.,

Many thanks for your letter of Dec. 5th received to-day. The difficulty is that C. B. cannot make his statement in time. He has lost two opportunities and there is no third. For I speak before he does, and must explain my interpretation. I shall be in London on Saturday afternoon and pleased to see you, as I always am. A little gossip would have been cheering, for most of your letter was like a King's Speech.

Yours always,
A. R.

One more communication closes the controversy, and on a certain note of asperity.

My Dear S.,

Many thanks for your letter. I did not dislike your warmth, for I like to perceive something above freezing-point in your vital fluid. But I wished it was not so uncompromisingly heated against my point of view. I cannot modify my interpretation of the Stirling speech and the subsequent silence without abdicating my brains. Indeed the *Daily Mail* publicly and pointedly says that it was made for the very purpose which it effected—that of excluding co-operation with me. If that is so it was superfluous. As to "keeping doors open" please remember once and for all that since 1896 the only doors that I desire kept open for me are those of my friends. And so it will be to the end.

The closing paragraph had no reference to Spender himself, (as one or two personal sentences which follow prove conclusively) but the chief Liberal Editor of the day, with Liberal unity as his chief political concern, might well be reduced to something like desperation as he surveyed the dissident elements in the situation he had to handle. "Never forget," Dean Inge once said from the pulpit of the Protestant Cathedral at Geneva, "that the unruly

wills and affections of sinful men are the material with which the League of Nations has to work". At least as intractable was the material at the disposal of an architect of Liberal unity in the decade before 1906.

There is little to be said of the remaining Rosebery letters. Two of them reveal the well-known allocation of his sympathies as between Germany and France.

> "Perhaps," he wrote from Windsor in June 1905, "you may be beginning to say that I was not mad when I said that the Anglo-French agreement [of 1904] was much more likely to lead to complication than to peace."

And in January 1907:

> "I was truly delighted to receive your letter this morning containing Clemenceau's declaration that he would not be hurried into war with Germany by English Teutophobes. There are some people I know with whom I would not play cards, but I don't throw the tongs at them when they enter the room. War with Germany by sea or land is a tremendous affair for any two nations to undertake; if we won we should gain little but a bloody nose and two black eyes. And there is absolutely no reason for us to fight except that we dislike each other. Why, in my recollection we have disliked every nation under the sun. Let us remain at peace as long as we can, and meanwhile there is this clear gain, that German methods are being found out—are becoming notorious. They are at least as old as Frederick the Great, and have been no secret to the initiated. But it is well that the whole world should know them, as then it will not pay to continue them."

Rosebery lived to see some fallacies in this argument exposed, but at the moment when he was writing, a year after the Algeciras Conference, the tension in Europe, and between France and Germany in particular, had eased temporarily.

On home affairs Rosebery was edging to the right. A note from Vichy in August 1908, at a time when Asquith, Lloyd George and Churchill were laying the foundations of a great social policy, emphasises its writer's divergence from them.

> "The Government," he says, "seems to me extremely strong,

and to have done well under their difficult circumstances and exuberant following—with one perhaps inevitable exception, the old age pensions, which fills my mind with foreboding, no doubt the effect of age. One is loath to admit that one's judgment may be as decrepit as one's body. But when I think of the American pension list, with the competition of party, I sink into blackness."

It is hard to imagine what he would have sunk into if he had lived to see the Beveridge report and the virtual adoption of it by the Government of the day.

Rosebery lived till 1929, but only some half dozen of his letters after the one just quoted have been preserved; there may or may not have been more to preserve. One, on Spender's severance from the *Westminster*, has already been quoted.* One in 1911, the Durbar year, referred to Spender's projected visit to India; one, in July 1914, commended the *Westminster* for "putting water in the Servian wine". A fourth, in January 1915, the fifth month of war, hails that ordeal as at least providing a truce from political controversy; it was still to deal Rosebery a bitter blow in the death of his second son, Neil Primrose. The letters as a whole demonstrate impressively the respect and regard in which Spender was held by a judge whose favourable opinion, fastidious and sometimes capricious though he might be, any man might feel flattered to win. From another point of view they indicate something of the loss the world has sustained through the absence of a volume, or volumes, of the collected correspondence of the fifth Earl of Rosebery.

Chapter IX

ESHER AND FISHER

In the whole volume of Spender's correspondence no letters are more interesting and—in the latter case—entertaining than those from Lord Esher and Lord Fisher. The former series is the briefer, but it may with advantage be considered first, for in some respects, particularly as regards naval matters, it serves as introduction to the latter. Esher was chairman, and Fisher one of the three members,

*p. 101.

of a committee set up in 1903 to study War Office reform (out of it came directly the Committee of Imperial Defence), and the two became fast friends, Esher being one of the chief recipients of Fisher's characteristically numerous, voluble and exuberant letters. Curiously enough, in their letters to Spender neither writer appears to have referred to the other.

Spender himself had the highest opinion of Esher, whom he described as "one of the most remarkable men of these times", comparing him, with his resolute refusal of any office except that of Secretary to the Office of Works, and later of permanent member of the Committee of Imperial Defence (he declined both the Viceroyalty of India and the Secretaryship for War), and the unique position he held behind all official scenes, with Colonel House in America. Esher, as his posthumously published journals show, knew everything of importance in the political world before it happened, and was in particularly close touch with King Edward VII. While no longer taking an active part in politics, he was instinctively a Liberal (he had indeed sat as Liberal member for Falmouth in the 'eighties), and in the days before 1906, when Spender, as a Liberal journalist, was in no close touch with Conservative Ministers, Esher constantly provided him with valuable information and suggestions. It has been shown already how deeply concerned he was for Liberal unity, and how important an initiative he took in the negotiations which led to the formation of Campbell-Bannerman's administration in December 1905.* He was a moving spirit in the London County Territorial Association, and made Spender an active participant in its operations. Both Esher and Fisher were ardent supporters of McKenna in the controversy over the latter's Big Navy programme in 1909, an episode which gains something of interest in retrospect from the fact that the First Lord's chief assailants (in the interests of economy) were the First Great War Premier, Lloyd George, and the Second Great War Premier, Winston Churchill. Various entries in Esher's Journals (in December 1906 he wrote to Morley suggesting that Spender should be made Under-Secretary for India with a seat in the House, and in September 1916, after quoting Spender's views on Lloyd George's political intentions, added that "he has always been deep in the counsels of Asquith and Grey") show how completely he reciprocated Spender's own esteem for him.

Esher's letters to Spender (so far as they survive) begin in September 1904, at a time when the unexpectedly protracted disinte-

*See p. 74.

gration of Balfour's Conservative Government made the question whether the next election would be fought by a united Liberal Party urgent.

> "*Our* difficulty," Esher wrote then, "is that should we by chance turn out Lord S. [a curious slip; Balfour succeeded his uncle as Prime Minister in 1902] we have no one to propose as his successor. This (I speak for many shrewd men here) is the crux, and restrains a large number from voting. If you could clear up that difficulty we should get much 'forarder'."

The next letter is not till 1909, by which time a Liberal Government had been in power for over three years, and the controversy over the six Dreadnoughts (which ultimately turned into eight) was in full blast. On that Esher writes:

> "I hear that McKenna is to be pushed out in Nov. Really over estimates. Nominally over recent bungling. They talk of an enquiry into this 'Dreadnought Type' and holding over new construction till the enquiry is over. The section of the Cabinet anxious to bring about McK's fall have got hold of that old fool Sir X.Y. I think there is a good deal in this, but you should enquire. McKenna is a good public servant, and has done very well. Luckily he is a hard fighter and a courageous man. To say, as the *Nation* (I think) says this week that Mr. G. selected 'trained financiers' for the Admiralty and W.O. and that neither of the present Ministers answers this description is absurd, certainly as regards McKenna. He is exactly the type Mr. G. *would* have chosen."

Fisher, still more emphatic, on this subject will be heard a little later.

The next letter does some despite to Esher's reputation as a prophet, but it is not the first time that that unique entity the British Commonwealth has run athwart the expectations of both critics and admirers. The date is August 1910, and the general subject the Irish question. "What an admirable article," writes Esher, "on Devolution. How shortsighted are the writers in *The Times*, etc. They will have to eat their words. In this next ten years the Empire will have to federate or dissolve." Thirty-five years so far have passed since that was written.

A day or two later in the same month we get back to McKenna. "McKenna has lost a good and powerful friend in King Edward

[the King had died on 7th May]. He was very kind to the King and the King liked him." After a passage on the Buckingham Palace Conference on the Irish problem the letter ends on the note it began on: "It would be a national misfortune to my mind if McKenna were shoved out by what really would be a dirty intrigue. His great merit in an affair of this kind is that he is a courageous and hard fighter. It is the 'touchy' people who go down. We must do all we can for him." After a letter at the beginning of September on the inner politics of the Territorial Association comes another six days later, marked "Secret and Private", and beginning "My dear Spender, a very private and secret word with you", the subject being once more the Rt. Hon. Reginald McKenna. "When the truly excellent McK. sees the King [George V], shortly, I hope he will *do all he can*, in spite of Admiralty precedents, etc., to carry out H.M.'s wishes. . . . I want McK. to organize his friends and supporters, and the King has to some extent in the past been under the spell of McK.'s enemies—as we all know." All this, of course, is in the nature of battles long ago, but the eight Dreadnoughts controversy was a question that shook a Government at the time, and McKenna's victory was a material ingredient in the establishment of British naval superiority in the war that came five years later.

The next letter is interesting because it expounds canons of naval strategy directly opposed to those approved by Fisher, with whom Esher usually saw eye to eye on such matters. Spender in this case shared Esher's view.

> "Your leader last night," the letter, dated 5th June 1912, ran, "was splendid. You could not do more. These people who want to concentrate every ship in the North Sea are mad. Remember that it must be followed by demands for large expenditure on the East Coast, and then—the kaleidoscope changes politically—our relations with Foreign Powers change, and all the money is wasted. Whereas the history of Europe as well as of G. Britain shows that the Mediterranean is permanently the centre of naval strategic gravity in Europe, because it is and always has been the main artery of seaborne trade. If the Bd. of A. could have their way the whole of the Dominion Fleets (when they come into being) will be in the North Sea! It is madness."

This criticism, and Spender's apparent concurrence in it, is a little surprising, for both men must have known, though the general

public did not, that the policy which concentrated the British Fleet in the North Sea and the French in the Mediterranean was part of a larger policy arising out of the Anglo-French Entente and the growing suspicion Germany was creating by her Navy Laws.

In 1915 Esher was a good deal in France, discharging a secret mission for Kitchener, and in two letters in March 1915—the seventh month of the war—he sent odd scraps of information and comment to Spender. In the first he mentioned that he had just returned from G.H.Q. "Sir John [French] very well and calm. It is difficult to write you any details. The plan was a very fine one, the secret well kept, but we were unlucky! That is all there is to be said." The reference is clearly to the costly and unfruitful British attack at Neuve Chapelle. But if the military value of the operation was negligible it had useful moral effects. "The French were enchanted that we made so fine an attack. It set at rest all sorts of misgivings they had about our flexibility." Esher's own misgivings were as to whether Kitchener was measuring his programme by his resources as he should. "I am rather alarmed lest K. may attempt to do too much, and then find his reserves depleted. This would not happen if his people tell him the truth. But do they? Sometimes—from what I hear—I have grave doubts." Another letter a few days later, written like the former from Paris, observes: "Of course there are all sorts of internal difficulties *here*, and our people will never understand the French, nor the French them! This is axiomatic. It is necessary to be always interpreting psychological differences."

After another letter in August that year on the prospects of conscription comes one in August 1916 about an article Esher had just written on the same subject, with a reference to a visit the writer had been paying to Balmoral. "Everything at Balmoral," he reports, "bodes well for the future. E. Grey was extraordinarily happy there—quite at his ease in that domestic circle. The King reads every state paper carefully and remembers details remarkably."

In January 1918 Esher was in Paris again. In the first week of that month (he was writing on the 13th) Mr. Lloyd George had been speaking on war-aims in London and President Wilson on the same subject—the famous Fourteen Points speech—in Washington.

"Is it not curious," Esher asks, "that Clemenceau has not said



Jerusalem, 1931

a word about L.G.'s or Wilson's speeches—that is to say in public? In private he has said a good deal in unflattering terms. I *cannot* believe that the Germans will look at any proposals involving the cession of Alsace and Lorraine. Yet we are now at war for the possession of these provinces and for very little else. So, as the greatest of all evils would be the break-up of our entente, we must *prepare* for a war that cannot end *militarily* before 1921: and our people and the French should be told the plain truth."

It is just as well in the light of events that they were not, but in view of the strength of the Germans when Esher was writing his judgement was not as wildly fallacious as it looks to-day.

By May 1918, when Esher next wrote, the situation looked black for the Allies. The Germans' March offensive had been arrested, after a great loss of territory, but no counter-stroke had yet been effected. But Esher was concerned more with the political than with the military prospect.

"Really," he protests, "the dishonesty of our policy [Spender here interjects a pencilled note, 'it wasn't *our* policy'] is heart-breaking. Poincaré claiming the Rhine provinces. Sonnino bleating for Trieste. And yet you and others are meeting under the auspices of the ineffable —— to claim a League of Nations as the main objective of the war. No one with any courage. Asquith sunk in some unexplained lethargy that makes every patriot shrink from contemplating his advent to power. L.G. battling with forces that he is too 'adroit' or too 'slippery' to control. Old Clemenceau delighting in showing up Poincaré. . . . I wonder what Wilson thinks of it all. He may come down any day on the whole lot like a load of bricks. Do not be surprised if he makes himself disagreeable. Can you imagine what Mr. G. would have made of this situation?"

Then, with an agreeable transition (the letter was written from Esher's home at Callander): "Well, my dear Spender, there are always the eternal hills, and the Highland burns that find their way to the sea."

Esher died in 1930. In January 1928 he wrote to Spender about the latter's *Life, Journalism and Politics*, which had just appeared. Of the various comments it drew from him only one need be quoted. "One very suggestive remark you make about J.M., and how differently the events of 1914 might have been shaped if he

had been at the F.O. (as he would have liked to be in 1905). No one will ever believe that J.M. had a Palmerstonian touch in his forefinger. But he had. More like Elizabeth than 'Gentle Annie'.* C.B.'s diagnosis was wrong."

From 1903 Esher and Fisher were, as already stated, closely associated on the War Office Reform committee, and it was perhaps natural that Spender, writing in 1927, should say of a meeting twenty-three years earlier: "Esher, I think, it was, who passed me on to 'Jackie' Fisher." As a matter of fact it was not Esher, as a letter from Fisher, to be quoted in a moment, shows, nor was the year, as Spender suggests elsewhere, 1903 but 1904. In this latter year Sir John Fisher, who had entered the Navy as a midshipman precisely fifty years earlier, took office at the Admiralty as First Sea Lord. There he remained till he retired under the age-limit in 1910, but in 1914, when a discreditable public clamour drove Prince Louis of Battenberg from the post of First Sea Lord owing to his German relationships, Fisher was called back by Winston Churchill, who was then First Lord, for a pregnant seven months, till he resigned in a characteristically dramatic way over disagreements about the Dardanelles operations.

Spender's first contact with Fisher was of the latter's seeking. A letter of 25th September 1904, from Carlsbad, in the Admiral's immense handwriting runs:

> DEAR MR. SPENDER,
>
> Providence is always very kind to me! I have long wanted to get your ear, and yesterday Haldane says you'll lend it to me! I get back to London Oct. 20 and begin work as First Sea Lord on Oct. 21. (Trafalgar Day). (I say to all my friends a good fighting day to begin!) Some day after that I will write and ask you when we can meet! I shall try and give you a good quarter of an hour.
>
> Yours,
>
> J. A. FISHER.

From this subdued and formal missive (by comparison with the writer's normal style) a great deal flowed. Before long Fisher's letters were beginning "My beloved Spender" and ending "Yours till charcoal sprouts" or something similar. The flow lasted till Fisher resigned in 1915 in circumstances which, as will be seen, associated Spender rather closely with the event. It was no doubt

*What C.B. habitually called Morley was "Priscilla".

during the "good quarter of an hour" mentioned above that one anecdote related by Spender had its setting.

> "My first meeting with him," Spender wrote, "somewhere about the year 1903 [it was clearly 1904] is vividly impressed on my mind. He had never seen me till that moment, but he plunged at once into an account of a dinner at which he had met the King [Edward VII] in the previous week. He had said to the King: 'We'll have a picnic at Kiel. We'll just go along and put two British ships one each side of a German; and then we'll say to the German, as the policeman says to the drunk: "Come along quietly and there'll be no trouble, but if you don't then there'll be trouble, and no mistake about it".' 'And what,' I asked, 'did the King say to that?' Fisher looked at me quizzically for a moment, and then burst out laughing. 'The King said: "My God, Fisher, you must be mad".' "

The comment can hardly be deemed surprising or inappropriate.

Thenceforward journalist and First Sea Lord (and Mrs. Spender, for Fisher was always conscious of the feminine aspect of terrestrial existence) were in close and constant contact. That had various results for Spender—one of them a precarious descent in a submarine at Portsmouth in company with Winston Churchill in days when it was never very certain what would happen to a submarine when once it had submerged. That must have been in November 1904 (a fortnight after their first conversation) to judge by a letter dated 3rd November, inviting Spender to travel down to Portsmouth for the day with Fisher, with the inducement "you will see a submarine en route". Spender, of course, very properly turned the acquaintance to legitimate journalistic advantage, as another letter, less than another fortnight later, indicates.

> DEAR MR. SPENDER,
>
> Thank you for your nice letter. I have persuaded the cleverest officer in the Navy (Captain Bacon, D.S.O., he is my principal Naval Assistant and he wouldn't be there if he wasn't!) to write your articles. Shall I give him the outline or do you want to see him? It will beat anything ever in your paper not excepting the Editor and *that's* saying something immense!
>
> Yours very sincerely,
> J. A. FISHER.

The sailor-journalist is, of course, Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon,

who commanded the Dover Patrol in the last war, and subsequently became Fisher's biographer.

At this point there is a gap in the correspondence. When it is renewed in February 1908 the subject is one very close to Fisher's heart, the "Dreadnought", on which all his hopes and faith were set. This historic ship, which had been built with great speed and secrecy in 1906 and 1907, once she was in commission made every other warship in the world, including the British, obsolete. The German fleet was put at particular disadvantage in relation to our own, for while Britain now possessed a prototype, and could proceed to lay down several Dreadnoughts a year, German constructors had first of all to glean what particulars they could about the new type, and in several of the particulars they began by gleaning wrong. What was more, the Kiel Canal had to be completely reconstructed before a ship of the dimensions of the "Dreadnought" could be taken through it, and that work was not completed till the summer of 1914. It is not surprising that Fisher, with an abnormal capacity for exhilaration, should be exhilarated now. This letter, however, is studiously mild. Its purpose was simply to invite Spender to come and be told the secrets about the "Dreadnought". "The truth is that we want no one to know the truth about the 'Dreadnought' and that hampers one a good deal. I don't want to influence you, nor for you to say a word—indeed quite the other way—but I should like you personally to be convinced (and I know I can convince you) that the introduction of the 'Dreadnought', in ways at present unknown to you has been economical and likely to be peace-preserving! I think it was on Friday you said something in the *Westminster Gazette* abt the introduction of the Dreadnought type being a mistake, and this put it into my head to write to you. I promise not to bore you,"—an assurance which might be characterized as the acme of superfluity. A postscript to a postscript to the same letter mentions that "I am here wasting precious time considering an invasion of England by Germany under the inconceivable conditions of the 'Bolt from the Blue' school".

The "Dreadnought" has a way of cropping up at intervals, with or without provocation, in Fisher's correspondence. Thus, for example, in a letter of 10th August 1910, primarily about internal combustion engines:

> "(mind we paralysed all armoured-ship building in the world for 18 months and got a dramatic lead which still immensely helps us and confounds our enemies, e.g. the first two German 'Dread-

noughts' are full of horrors and they tried hard to sell them to the Turks *but this is secret*)"; and "The Dreadnought was bound to have been discovered like the planet Neptune but luckily we like Leverrier cut out Professor Adams as we recognized the perturbations before all others!"

A letter of 6th February 1909, on an article in the *Westminster* has been quoted already.* The next is of the same tenor, but it covers other ground as well.

MY DEAR SPENDER,

I hope it is not improper or too presumptious [*sic*] to offer you my admiration for your article last night on the Beresfordian oration. *It's splendid*—and almost as good as your famous article on "The Government and the Admiralty"—and the last part of the article as good as the first—*that every penny spent on the Army is a penny taken from the Navy* and millions of Armies futile if the Navy not powerful beyond all question!

Reiteration is the secret of conviction!

Repetition is the soul of journalism!

This is a secret—only last Tuesday we had to deal in Defence Committee on the defence of Hong-Kong with an insidious military scheme fostered by a silly Admiral to provide for the British Navy being wiped out! It's really damnable! So kindly keep on pegging away. It's the only way!

Yours till the angels smile on us,

J.F.

Please give my love to Mrs. Spender. I shall try to see her next Sunday afternoon. Did I give her Pascal? "Le cœur a ses raisons que le raison ne connaît point."

We are now, it will be observed, getting into the region of Fisherine subscriptions. That to the immediately previous letter (not quoted) was the more familiar "Yours till Hell freezes", with the slightly cryptic addition "That's more rugged than the others". Early in 1910 arrived a double sheet of large best-quality paper bearing simply the pæan: Réjouis-toi!

Victory!!!

Sat. 15 Jan. 10.

The reference, I assume, is to the declaration of the first day's results in the General Election which followed the Peers' rejection of

*p. 34.

Lloyd George's Budget (General Elections were at that time spread over ten days or more).

From this point the correspondence warms up. In February 1910 Spender received the following:

> My Beloved Spender,
>
> I have just been reading my *Westminster*! (My Solace and my Joy!) and here are these words about the House of Lords:—
>
> "The solution can only be found on elective lines."
>
> I'm a babe in the wood as regards politics but a babe can see the whole pith of the situation is contained in them—Reiteration is the secret of conviction and Repetition is the Soul of Journalism—so I hope you will keep on saying those golden words. Myself I love a mild Despotism and a chastened Bismarck but we can't have either in this free country where every man can do as he likes and if he doesn't he's made to! which is what public opinion (as they call it) means—it's damnable! Why should I wear a tall hat when I hate it? (but the King would put me in the corner if I didn't!)

Another of two days later, beginning "My beloved Friend" is of importance only for the dogma

> "*Ridicule the one and only weapon for those twins* [Lord Charles Beresford and Robert Blatchford]. Never fight a chimney sweep; no matter how often you knock him down you get some of the soot! Deride him!
>
> Yours till we play harps!
> Fisher."

Fisher was by this time (April 1910) nearing the end of his term of office at the Admiralty, but he had a good deal to get off his mind before he went. In this month, in a letter nominally expressing regret that Spender had been unable to keep some engagement or other, he shoots off into a disquisition on soldiers who write on naval matters:

> "I have never yet met a soldier who had the faintest conception of a sea-campaign. They read History but History is a record of exploded ideas! They used to load the guns at the muzzle now we do it at the breech! In the boilers we put the fire where the

water used to be! In Nelson's day the sailors fought and the officers looked on—(*vide* Nelson at the most critical moment of the battle walking up and down the quarter-deck having a yarn with his Flag Captain! Marvellous that no one has seized that marvellous episode in the most marvellous battle of the world!) Well now it's solely the officers who win the battle—the sailors are automatons! There are silly asses like —— who grievously mislead public opinion and our dear Mr. Haldane is the most misled of all! (But this is only for your own digestion!) . . . I had a note this morning that Beresford is hatching another naval scare over the Austrian Dreadnoughts. The Navy is the Tories' only chance in an election! A clever man told me it did wonders for them last time! The 'majorité des sots' always win! Heaven bless you! If I was the King I'd see everyone d—d before I had another election.

Yours for ever. FISHER."

So the correspondence proceeds. In August come six foolscap sheets on a variety of topics, mostly naval. A paragraph had appeared somewhere about the German firm of Blohm and Voss building a motor-liner for the Atlantic trade.

"*Do you know what that means?* Motor Battleships! No funnels —no boilers—no smoke. Only a d—d chauffeur and prodigious economy! 'Colossal billig'! as the Germans would say! And imagine the fighting effects of all this! They are quite incalculable!" Then a vehement argument for the democratisation of the Navy—"La carrière ouverte aux talents"—and the whole summed up with the assertion: "The Admiralty and the Government must be shoved over the precipice over these two things—oil and internal combustion engines as regards propulsion of warships and the Navy open to all—I have helped in lots of 'Shoves'! the water-boiler—the Turbine—the 'Dreadnought'—Scrapping—Nucleus crews—Redistribution of the Fleet—Naval War College —Navigation School—Feeding the Sailors—etc., etc., etc. In every single one it was 'Athanasius contra Mundum'—the motto is "*Do right and d—— the odds!*"

In December 1910 Fisher paid a short visit to America. His swiftly acquired impressions of the country and its people, and one of its leading citizens in particular, must have been of considerable interest to Spender, who had at that time never been to America

himself, and remain of considerable interest still in the light of subsequent events.

"I was a month away," Fisher wrote, "and in a 'whirl' all the time and never once saw an English newspaper and very seldom an American one and when I did there was no English news in it which so astonished me—I suppose the Americans are equally astonished at never finding anything American in an English newspaper! . . . I saw many very great men and had delightful *tête-à-têtes* especially with the coming President after Taft Dr. Woodrow Wilson, President of the Princeton University and now Governor Elect of New Jersey—*He is a very great man!* —reminded me immensely of Abraham Lincoln in his laconic wisdom—Free Trade is coming along if he gets in! *and he will!* . . . About 70 millionaires gave me a private lunch. *No speeches.* I told them it was a d—d fine old hen that hatched the American Eagle *and you should have heard them cheer*! I am absolutely convinced that neither Politicians or Journalists have the faintest idea how deep is the desire of Americans to draw closer to England! *I am sure of this.* The great American School Engine does it. Thousands upon thousands of aliens pour into their country annually of every type on earth—Germans, Hebrews, Slavs, Italians, Irish, etc., etc., and in the second generation one and all are *pure Americans*—Assimilation in excelsis! The boa-constrictor swallowing a bull isn't in it! . . . The assimilating-machine has made their language *English*—their literature *English*—their traditions *English* and quite unknown to themselves their *aspirations* are *English*! Heaps of men with names without a vowel bragged to me that their mother's sister's aunt's cousin's grandfather's uncle was *English*! We shall be D—D fools if we don't exploit this for the peace of the world and the dominance of our race! *A great English-speaking Federation!* That's the Great Ideal! but 'Festina Lente!' it mustn't be hustled! We want Rosebery and Morley to preach it! They asked me 'to raise the Middle West' (as they called it) when I spoke to them all about it but I am a cypher—(only of use at the end and not at the beginning!) Perhaps a d—d fine fellow called Spender may take it up! God knows!

Yours everlastingly,"

An estimate of the United States based on less than a month there must be taken for what it is reasonably worth, but Fisher's appraisal of Wilson, at a date when the next nominating conventions were

eighteen months, and the polling for President close on two years, ahead is striking.

The First Sea Lord's return from America almost coincided with the end of his term of office. On January 21st 1911, he wrote to Spender: "Next Wednesday a sad day for me, as I disappear from the Navy so I am going to disappear into Italy—'the world forgetting, by the world forgot'. By the by as a private—quite private—bit of information—X came to see me last week to extol the new scheme of education as closely watched by him the last 4 years at Osborne and Dartmouth—he couldn't praise it too highly—and he told me the Prince of Wales [the present Duke of Windsor] read the *Westminster Gazette* every day of his life! If the new scheme of education taught him to do that I am rewarded!"

Having, in accordance with his declared intention, disappeared into Italy, Fisher utilised not a little of his new-found leisure in firing off explosive letters to his friends, Spender of course among them, on diverse topics, mainly naval. The principal feature of a communication of February 27th (1911) which duly found its way from Pallanza to 45 Sloane Street was the postscript:

"The Principles of National Defence.

I. An Ocean Fleet	The odd numbers work together and so do the even.
II. An Invasion Fleet	I Licks Creation.
III. A Sea-going Army	II is a projectile to be fired by the Navy.
IV. A Stay-at-home Army	III Never leaves our shores (submarines, etc.).
	IV is to comfort the old women of both sexes!"

In May a letter from Monaco (from "Yours till charcoal sprouts, Fisher") dwelt on "something I have much at heart and am engineering like a mole! and that is a world-wide English-speaking monopoly of *wireless*, to be carried through at the Imperial Conference"; another in October from Lucerne (from "Yours till we part at the Pearly Gates, Fisher") pointed derisively to the time Italy was taking to get 30,000 men into Tripoli—this for the benefit of the scaremongers who prated of "only a few hours' command of the sea being required to throw a hundred thousand men on the coast of England",—and denounced Lord Salisbury's "criminal folly" in arguing that in backing Turkey we had put our money on the

wrong horse. "I did not agree with that, and Abdul Hamid gave me a 500-guinea diamond star (bless his heart)."

All this was a casual enough commentary, but for Fisher a new chapter in history began when in October 1911 Winston Churchill succeeded McKenna as First Lord of the Admiralty. (Fisher was always convinced that McKenna, whom he admired intensely, had been "outed by a dirty intrigue"—of which, however, he held McKenna's successor entirely innocent.) Here was a nice situation, Fisher away at Lucerne, and a new broom at the Admiralty. Whom would he sweep out? Whom would he sweep in? Could he be told what was what in time? That would depend on Spender, for Spender was manifestly the predestined intermediary between the late First Sea Lord at Lucerne and the new First Lord in Whitehall. So letter after letter in swift succession is discharged on Sloane Street. First comes the general commission; the date being 25th October:

> My Beloved Friend,
>
> If you could see Winston privately and show him the enclosed letter and could back it up I think you could say 'I have done the State some service'. I don't want a living soul to see it, *or to know of it* except you and Winston. Not even McKenna. Let the secret be between us three please!
>
> Yours, F.

Enclosed therewith seven quarto pages, emphasising as prelude the writer's lifelong regard for Winston—"we were on terms of the closest intimacy, and he was a splendid friend to me" (in spite of Winston's opposition to the eight Dreadnoughts in 1909). And now: "*What is the best thing for the Navy?* The best thing for the Navy is that Winston should have a Board of Admiralty *harmonious, progressive and determined*! and I have that Board elaborated." For the moment, it might be conceded, there should be no changes, for they might be construed as implying that the new Chief was swerving from the vital principle of a strong navy. At the same time—and this consideration might predominate—it would certainly be advantageous for him to start with the men he was always going to work with—and these were who the men ought to be:

"I propose that he should take as his First Sea Lord Prince Louis of Battenberg, the very ablest admiral after Sir Arthur Wilson that we possess both afloat and ashore. (*Private. Wilson is no good ashore.*)

He is an intimate personal friend of the German Emperor and brother-in-law to the Emperor's brother. He is the most capable administrator in the Admirals' list *by a long way* and he will just 'roll up' all Admiralty opponents in the Committee of Imperial Defence. (*Sir A. K. Wilson is not Aaron!*—he's Moses! he only shines at sea! Battenberg is Moses and Aaron in one, I think also this should please the Liberal Party—they will say what better proof could we give of our confidence to Germany than selecting a man as First Sea Lord with German proclivities. In reality he is more English than the English. Captain Mark Kerr should be Winston's private secretary, as he is the ablest captain on the Navy List and he's a bosom friend of Battenberg, so Winston will use him to 'engineer' Battenberg in times of friction (*such times must always be*). Sir George Callaghan, now second in command of the Home Fleet, should be Second Sea Lord and Admiral Jerram now second in command of the Mediterranean Fleet should be 4th Sea Lord and he should retain the present 3rd Sea Lord and Controller (Briggs). These men are the ablest now at sea and give the new Board *Homogeneity—Harmonious—Progressive—Determined* and *all* fresh from the sea!

Sir A. K. Wilson should be made a Peer.

Send the present Second Sea Lord into Battenberg's place in the Home Fleet.

Send the present 4th Sea Lord into Jerram's place.

Send the present Private Secretary into Admiral Slade's place in East Indies when shortly vacant.

Move Sir John Jellicoe from the Atlantic Fleet to be second in command of the Home Fleet *vice* Callaghan who would come as Second Sea Lord.

And Admiral Burney to Atlantic Fleet *vice* Jellicoe with temporary rank as Admiral. *Sir John Jellicoe is the future Nelson*—he is *incomparably* the ablest Sea Admiral we have; perhaps better than Battenberg—Yes I should say he is—so its important to get him as second in command of our main fleet. Captain *Ballard* should *at once* succeed Admiral Bethell as Director of Naval Intelligence and Admiral Bethell get the first vacant appointment. If these appointments are made (*and each one hangs on the other it's a case of all or none*) then Winston can sleep quiet in his bed (I have used that expression before).

Yours always,
FISHER."

The inevitable postscript, doubly underlined (as was the reference

to Jellicoe as the future Nelson above) runs "Very important indeed to have Ballard as D. of I."

That, it might be thought, was enough. It was not. Hard on its heels came an afterthought:

MY DEAR SPENDER,

I sent you an "*express*" letter early this morning. I wrote hurriedly *but it's all sound* and if Winston don't take my advice *he will be a d—d fool*; and make the mistake of his lifetime! *but he must take it all* [this last word with quadruple underlining]—if he leaves out a single one appointment then the Arch will fall in—*each appointment is a keystone.*

Impress this on him!!! I will if required come and take my coat [off] for him just as much as for McKenna because it is *the Navy* and *the Navy alone* I think of. . . . An urgent letter has come from Sir Ernest Cassel saying Winston wanted to meet me. Private: Cassel is Winston's *very close* friend! I've telegraphed to him in reply that I've sent him (Cassel) an express letter and in that express letter I've told [him] to induce Winston to follow the advice I have sent him via J. A. Spender of 45 Sloane Street and that he (Cassel) and Winston are not to mention my writing to a living soul else but you.

Yours in haste, FISHER.

So Spender got his orders—to give Winston his orders. But receiving orders is one thing and executing them another. That was a matter on which Spender was quite capable of exercising his independent judgment. In his exercise of it he clearly decided that it was well that Churchill should know of Fisher's ideas, whether he thought fit to adopt them or not, for on October 30th, the First Lord wrote to thank him for sending on "Fisher's most interesting letter", adding that before returning it he had made a note of the recommendations. How far the appointments which in due time were made in accordance with the recommendations would have been made in any case only the Prime Minister of to-day (1945) can say. Prince Louis of Battenberg and Sir John Jellicoe at any rate were no doubt marked out by their innate qualities for the high offices they subsequently held.

Having despatched his series of letters Fisher appears to have suddenly followed them himself (Churchill sent for him)—and taken some Grand Hotel National, Lucerne, stationery with him, for it is on notepaper so headed that he writes to Spender, evidently from

somewhere in England, a letter, dated October 31st, full of single and double underlinings, more lavishly garnished with postscripts than usual, and headed "Secret". It recorded that "I have had a time of it with Winston, *and 3½ pathetic hours with McKenna*", and went on to describe a week-end just spent at Reigate with Winston, Lloyd George, Haldane, Rufus Isaacs, who all apparently argued the military case against the "strong navy" case. One of the various addenda mentions that "Winston is wonderfully intimate with me and opens all his heart"; another contains the injunction: "Please post enclosed to McKenna as Winston says I am watched and that my letters are opened by the French Government. This is very private. D—n their eyes if they open this"; a third runs: "He is going to send a special messenger with his letters to me and mine to him; *keep all this secret.*"

The next summer, 1912, found Fisher abroad again, and in May he wrote to Spender from Naples, urging him to make contact with Captain (now Lord) Hankey, being convinced that the acquaintance would be for the benefit of both. Then, after a reference to the fact that the Prime Minister (Asquith) and Winston were to pay him a visit in the Admiralty yacht, he proceeds:

> "I am greatly interested in Marischall von Bieberstein's coming to London. *He's a greater than Bismark!* I happen to know an immense deal about him through a mutual great friend. The German Chancellor and Foreign Secretary are his facile dupes! Who is *our* coming man? Our Consul-General here was 15 years in Persia and he weeps! but it don't signify
>
> 'Time and the ocean and some guiding star
> In High Cabal have made us what we are!'*
>
> Yours always,
> FISHER.
>
> We are the lost 10 Tribes! It's all right! we are being looked after! This reminds me of a very clever woman I met here who I told that the lost 10 tribes hadn't noses like Judah and Benjamin and she said 'Of course they hadn't! They wouldn't have been lost if they had!'"

As 1914 opened, war, and as result of it changes at the Admiralty, were approaching. A letter Spender got from Fisher at the end of January contained one sentence significant in the light of events:

*From Sir William Watson's *Ode on the Coronation of Edward VII*, and a favourite quotation of Fisher's. Watson, however, wrote "fostering star".

"I wrote to Winston in the exact sense of your letter and he wrote me the most loving reply and wished to God I was with him as First Sea Lord." In July a letter from Langham House, Ham Common, accompanying some sweet peas for Mrs. Spender, mentioned that "*I have been very busy!* and I think next Tuesday will pretty nearly finish my battles at Committee of Imperial Defence over compulsory service and the Channel Tunnel. I luckily got a nice little 20 minutes with Kitchener at Queen Alexandra's Garden Party! (*How Providence does come along!*) As you know at one time I was rather hot on the Channel Tunnel but I discovered this was an artful dodge towards Conscription so I bolted!—Do try and come here some day before 7th AUG. when I go to Bohemia."

But he did not go to Bohemia. By 7th August no one was going anywhere out of England except the vanguard of the British Expeditionary Force. Instead the Admiral shortly went to bed with a temperature, and thence wrote to Spender: "I don't think I am yet up to seeing you—I regret to say I cannot refrain from being violent, and that puts my temperature up! (D—n the temperature!)" That was the postscript. The letter itself mentioned that "I've had a most heavenly letter from Jellicoe 5 minutes ago—*breathing such a spirit*! It's too splendid". It was the first month of war, and Sir John Jellicoe was in command of the Grand Fleet.

Two months later Fisher, who had retired from the Admiralty in 1910 and from the Navy in 1911, came back to Whitehall as First Sea Lord at the age of 73. That meant that, subject to the First Lord, he was in supreme control of the war at sea, and within a week of his appointment Sturdee was despatched with the *Invincible* and *Inflexible* to avenge at the Falkland Islands von Spee's destruction of Cradock's squadron at Coronel. With Fisher at the Admiralty Spender was often there too, talking, and sometimes listening at night to the wireless messages from the Fleet. The talk was soon on one topic, for tension between Churchill and Fisher (who wanted to send the fleet into the Baltic) over the Dardanelles project was growing steadily. Churchill always claimed, and with documentary justification, that Fisher originally acquiesced in the idea of the campaign, but if he did his dislike of it developed rapidly. At one historic War Council at the end of January only the most urgent personal representations by Kitchener prevented him from resigning on the spot. But the campaign went forward, the first naval bombardment of the Turkish fortifications beginning on February 19th. Fisher grew more disapproving, more critical and more morose, but a rupture was postponed till the middle of May. When it did

come it was part of a triple crisis—or at any rate the threat of one. On the 15th, a Saturday, Fisher wrote briefly to the First Lord that he could no longer continue as his colleague, and he remained immured in his official residence, refusing resolutely to enter the Admiralty itself. News of his action precipitated a political crisis, and resulted on the Monday in the formation of the first Coalition Government, in which Balfour took the place of Churchill as First Lord. On the same day—the third element in the crisis—news came suddenly that the German fleet had put to sea and that the greatest naval battle in history was in prospect.

Neither the formation of the new Government nor the evolutions of the German fleet (which put back to port after all) concerned Spender directly. Fisher's resignation did. At the vital moment he appears unobtrusively where he might be expected to appear—at the centre of things—and is despatched by Asquith to the naval Achilles with news that Churchill is leaving the Admiralty and Balfour taking over, so that resignation may be unnecessary after all. Spender went, told his story and attempted persuasion. But there was never a hope. For an hour Fisher stormed and denounced, and then Spender left him. The result of the interview was not surprising if the Admiral was already in the mood which four days later inspired his six-point ultimatum to the Prime Minister, requiring among other things that Churchill should be excluded from the Cabinet altogether, and Sir A. K. Wilson from the Admiralty, the Committee of Imperial Defence and the War Council, and that he, Fisher, should have sole professional control of the war at sea.

So ended Lord Fisher's second term as First Sea Lord—but not his public service. He became chairman of the Board of Invention and Research (the body which Philip Guedalla described in his famous epigram as "sitting in an office in Cockspur Street waiting like a kind of inverted Mr. Micawber for something to turn down"). In *Life, Journalism and Politics* Spender writes:

> "He never asked me to see him again, and I heard incidentally that he resented something I had said in the interview at Admiralty Arch. Happily we had one last meeting. Landing perilously one day on a shelter in the middle of Piccadilly, I almost fell into his arms, and received at once the old affectionate greeting. Then amid the traffic we stood talking for a full quarter of an hour, and I can see now his gay figure, and jovial wave of the hand as he went his way. That was the last time I saw him, and a few weeks later he was dead."

There is some lapse of memory here. Fisher did ask Spender to see him again. A letter, undated, written from the Board of Invention and Research, begins as of old "My beloved Spender", laments that a talk between them ("I have so much to tell you") has to be postponed, and suggests another date for it. And another in 1919, the year before his death, to "My beloved Friend" runs:

> "I still ever read my *Westminster* and thank you for your kind 'back-up' and I hope the rumour is not true that some Government appointment is taking you away. My book appears on Trafalgar Day and I will send you a copy."

He goes on to ask Spender to send him, for reproduction in the Book (the highly discursive volume entitled *Memories*) some of F.C.G.'s cartoons from the *Westminster*, and finishes "Yours for evermore". It must have been after this that Spender met him for the last time in Piccadilly. It had been a memorable friendship. The record of it demonstrates the appeal that Spender's personality could make to a man of action no less than it did, perhaps more naturally, to men of thought.

Chapter X

ASPECTS OF NORTHCLIFFE

It would be difficult to imagine two men—I will not say two journalists, because Northcliffe, though he did write occasionally, was the entrepreneur, not the writing journalist—more different than Alfred Spender and Alfred Harmsworth. It might be supposed that they had nothing in common; that indeed was true; yet they obviously liked one another. Spender makes no secret of his liking for Northcliffe, and Northcliffe's liking for Spender can be inferred plainly enough from Spender's story of their contacts. How they first met is not recorded, but it was in the early days of the *Westminster*, when Spender's office was on one side of Tudor Street and Harmsworth's on the other, a contiguity which made it more unlikely that they should not be acquainted with one another than that they should. Harmsworth was the younger by between two and three years. When Spender first knew him he was still

established in the office of *Answers*, his first journalistic success. He took over the *Evening News* in 1894 and started the *Daily Mail* in 1896. The *Westminster* had been started in 1893.

The two—Spender a little over thirty, Harmsworth a little under—found the salt of their conversations in the fact that they were such admirable foils for each other. Spender's journalistic ideals have been indicated in earlier chapters of this volume. Harmsworth had no journalistic ideals except success, which meant first in time, but not first in importance in Harmsworth's scale of values, money, but ultimately, and most to be desired, power. He wanted to sell his papers incidentally for the revenue they brought in, but he wanted the big circulations because he liked telling millions of people what to think. That at least was Spender's estimate of him, and there is little reason to challenge it.

On that basis he and Spender talked and argued. If Spender questioned the line a Harmsworth paper was taking, on journalistic or some other grounds, the proprietor of the paper clinched the argument by producing its latest circulation figures. That was conclusive and unanswerable. On his side he viewed with mild amusement the existence of a paper like *The Westminster*, run at a loss, with an incredibly small circulation, yet wielding an influence which it was indecent for any journal printing fewer than several hundred thousand copies to command. Yet when, about 1902, he thought rightly or wrongly that the paper was in difficulties he invited Spender to draw on him freely up to £100,000, and failed completely to comprehend the suggestion that, generous though the offer was, its acceptance would in effect create a relationship of master and servant. To do Northcliffe justice, in his mind it certainly would not have. Spender believed the offer to be perfectly disinterested, and there is little doubt that it was. That is the more intelligible in view of Northcliffe's complete indifference to the complications that might seem to arise from running two papers of diametrically opposite views under the same house-flag. He used to tell Spender what he would make of the *Westminster* as a commercial proposition if he had it, and to the objection that the *Westminster* and the *Daily Mail* could hardly be run from the same stable he only answered by asking blandly: Why not?

Nothing is more characteristic of Northcliffe's volatility than an incident at which Spender, as the French would say, assisted, some time in 1903. Chamberlain's tariff reform campaign was gathering way, but Northcliffe had not yet taken position in regard to it. His natural bent was Protectionist, but he doubted whether the country

would stand food-taxes, and the reports that his investigators brought him—he showed some of their little black books to Spender—redoubled the doubt. On the other hand it was no use opening the popular Press to leaders incapable of making a popular appeal, and Northcliffe had a poor opinion of the drawing power of men like Campbell-Bannerman or Asquith in that field. But there was one Liberal leader who might fill the bill, and to him Northcliffe addressed himself. Spender happened to be staying with Rosebery when a letter arrived from Northcliffe offering to put all the Harmsworth papers at Rosebery's disposal, subject only to the stipulation that the stage-management of the campaign should be in Northcliffe's hands. Rosebery handed the letter to Spender. Spender laughed. Rosebery laughed a little grimly. As result of the reply he sent, the Northcliffe battalions went solid for Protection.

During these years, down to 1905 or thereabouts, Spender remained on friendly terms with Northcliffe, going to stay with him from time to time at Sutton Place, near Guildford, and being whirled perilously along the Hog's Back in a 90 h.p. Mercedes till the needle for a moment showed a hundred miles an hour. Then, in 1908, Northcliffe acquired *The Times*. That, it might be supposed, could in no way concern Spender. Yet in fact it did—negatively—for it disposed of his chance of being editor of the greatest paper in the world. This is not the place to describe in detail the complicated and exciting contest for the possession of Printing House Square and all it stood for when the sale of *The Times* to someone became obviously necessary at the beginning of 1908. It is enough to say that there were three bidders in the field, Arthur Pearson, then owner of the *Daily Express*, whose hopes were ruined by a calculated announcement in *The Times* that negotiations for the acquisition of the paper by Mr. Pearson had reached an advanced stage; a Free Trade, or so-called "German" syndicate, headed by a Miss Brodie-Hall, a relative of Arthur Walter, supported by City friends associated with the Wiener Bankverein; and Northcliffe, to whom Moberly Bell, the powerful assistant-manager of *The Times*, turned in anger at the attempted secret deal with Pearson. Of the three would-be purchasers one would certainly, and one would possibly, have offered Spender the editorship. Regarding Pearson's intentions there is only the slender evidence provided by an entry (already quoted) in Lord Esher's diary for 28th January 1908:

"Spender called. He has been invited to edit the *Tribune*. This

had to be communicated to Pearson, for if *The Times* want him they must hurry."

That *The Times* under Pearson should have wanted Spender is on the face of it highly unlikely, for Pearson backed tariff reform with much more conviction than Northcliffe, and it is impossible to imagine Spender taking service under a proprietor whose views were those promulgated by the *Standard* and the *Daily Express*. But the intentions of the Free Trade group (about whom singularly little has been disclosed to this day) were in no doubt at all. If they acquired *The Times* Spender was to edit it, and Spender himself records that the last message he ever received from Campbell-Bannerman was an expression of hope that the deal would go through, and would result in Spender becoming the Editor of a Free Trade *Times*.

The question whether Spender would have taken *The Times* if it had been offered him perhaps needs to be asked. The answer, no doubt, is that it would depend on the conditions attached; as has been said, it can hardly be imagined that he would have taken office under Pearson. But that a journalist of Spender's age—he was forty-five at the time of the 1908 transactions—should refuse the greatest position in English journalism if his independence were adequately guaranteed is equally unimaginable. Moreover, devoted as Spender was to the *Westminster*, 1908 was a year of some unsettlement in Tudor Street. Sir George Newnes was parting with his proprietorship to a syndicate, which possessed still unproved capacities for good or evil. Spender was naturally enough concerned about his future, and if an invitation to Printing House Square had materialised old ties would probably have weighed less with him then than at any other moment. It did not materialise, for in the end *The Times* was acquired by Northcliffe, and Northcliffe left Buckle, the existing editor, undisturbed. But four years later the idea of Spender's translation was revived once more for a fleeting moment. Colonel Repington, the Military Correspondent of *The Times* (who, as unofficial agent had been responsible for the initiation of the Anglo-French military conversations in 1905) was the intermediary. He called on Spender to ascertain on what terms, if any, the Editor of the *Westminster* would accept the editorship of *The Times*, about to fall vacant through Buckle's resignation. How far Repington had Northcliffe's authority behind him is debatable, but Spender regarded him as an accredited emissary, and he could hardly have made the approach in

any other guise. But a quarter of an hour's conversation was enough to expose the impracticability of the idea. Spender remained Editor of the *Westminster*, and Geoffrey Robinson (who was later Geoffrey Dawson) became Editor of *The Times*.

In a pamphlet called *Newspapers and Their Millionaires*, which Northcliffe published in 1922 a short time before his death, he took occasion to deny that he had ever offered Spender the editorship of *The Times*. That, of course, was perfectly true. There is no reason to suppose that he ever did offer it to him. But the statement has no bearing one way or the other on the question whether Repington, with his tentative inquiries in 1912, was acting with Northcliffe's cognisance, or even on his instigation. In the same pamphlet Northcliffe made it very clear what his opinion of Spender as a journalist was. Having repudiated the suggestion about the editorship of *The Times*, he continues:

> "I did once say to a well-known public man in the Liberal side that, in my opinion, Mr. Spender was one of the very few men who *could* edit *The Times*, adding that his treatment by the Liberal Party, and especially by Mr. Asquith, was no encouragement to young Liberal journalists. In my opinion Mr. Asquith has been most ungrateful to him. Is it too late for the Liberal Party to recognise eminent journalistic service? Is there not a vacant Directorship of the Suez Canal, such as the Earl of Balfour secured for his secretary, my friend, Sir Ian Malcolm? I was told when I was at Suez that there *is* such a vacant directorship."

It must be supposed that this came sooner or later under Spender's eye. Unfortunately his comments on his relations with Asquith, and on Northcliffe's idea of a suitable reward for a great journalist, are not available.

There is one other paragraph in the same pamphlet more fortunately inspired. In discussing the different London morning papers, Northcliffe turned his attention in due course to the *Westminster*, by this time numbered among the morning papers in question.

> "When I look at his [Lord Cowdray's] wasteful *Westminster Gazette*," he observed caustically, "its ignorance, provincialism, extravagance, mismanagement and muddle written all over it, and no Alfred Spender, I cannot in any way connect Cowdray with it. . . . The old *Westminster* had a cachet of its own, and for

the life of me I cannot understand why, having got one of the few men who know how to edit a daily political newspaper, Mr. Alfred Spender, they did not grapple him to their hearts with hooks of steel."

Lord Northcliffe's closing quotation seems to have gone a little astray, but the soundness of his general verdict is not to be contested.

So far comparative harmony prevailed between the *Westminster* under Spender and the various journals under Lord Northcliffe's proprietorship. Papers of different political colour in Fleet Street have their antagonisms and their skirmishes, but they rarely engage in duels, and the *Westminster* was temperamentally less inclined to polemics than most. But in February 1916 a conflict flared up which enlivened Fleet Street and many other purlieus even in the midst of a far different conflict, out of which indeed the journalistic skirmish indirectly arose. The first shot, it must be admitted, was fired by the *Westminster*, or, to speak personally, by Spender. It was a moment when London and the eastern counties were suffering from Zeppelin raids. The damage done and the casualties inflicted were negligible compared with the devastation of the 1940's, but in 1915 and 1916 air-raids were a new experience, to which the public mind did not adjust itself at once. On the question of policy, or strategy, arising out of the raids *The Times* and the *Westminster* were at variance, the former clamouring for more protection for the civil population, the latter insisting that the armies in the field must have first claim on the exiguous air-force then available. The rival theses might have been enunciated indefinitely without animus if chance had not put into Spender's hands a weapon too effective for any enterprising journalist to neglect. *The Times* had for weeks been attacking the Government for minimising the damage done by the Zeppelins, and insinuating that if the full truth were known it would prove to be something very different from what the official communiqués suggested. Here, obviously, was an intimation highly encouraging to the enemy, who drew the natural conclusion that if the attacks were as successful as *The Times* indicated the only rational course was to intensify them vigorously. That was precisely the conclusion a leading Berlin paper, the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, did draw, in an article based largely on quotations from *The Times*. Spender's eye fell on the article, and he reproduced it in the *Westminster*, with brief but pointed comments. This was on a Saturday—February

19th. On Monday the 21st *The Times* reacted, with a leader headed "Dishonest Journalism", in which self-righteous indignation was judiciously mingled with assaults on the *Westminster*, that journal being accused of having argued in the past first in favour of a small army and then of a small air-force.

So the battle was joined. It did not last long—only for the inside of a week—but while it did last the pace was hot. It soon got personal, particularly when Northcliffe whistled up his *Evening News* in support of his morning paper. The *News* went for personalities at once, attacking Spender himself in a leading article on February 23rd, and heading its leading article the next evening "Spender und Von Kühlmann"—this as accompaniment to a news article "Kühlmann and Spender", beginning "Little by little the connection of the *Westminster Gazette* and its editor Mr. J. A. Spender with the pro-German propaganda before the war is leaking out". The article itself was a rechauffé of letters from that morning's *Times*, in which "Watchman", "A Patriot" and the ultra-Tory L. J. Maxse had martialled a variety of quotations to suit their book from past issues of the *Westminster* and from a pamphlet by Spender entitled "The Foundations of British Policy",* itself a reprint of *Westminster* articles. But when it came to digging into files the *Westminster* staff could hold its own with any; Charles Geake's retentive memory alone was equal to half a dozen other men's. So after incidentally unearthing the names of three German citizens among shareholders of *The Times* and billing London with the discovery, Spender produced an article headed:

LORD NORTHCLIFFE
SOME PAST UTTERANCES ABOUT GERMANY

containing two excerpts in particular with a sharper cutting edge than anything that had so far figured in the controversy—and both were well displayed in heavy type. One was from an interview in which Lord Northcliffe, travelling in America in 1909, had affirmed:

> "I know the Germans intimately. From childhood I have travelled extensively throughout most of the German States. I have many German family connections, and I venture to say that outside the usual body of Anglophobes one meets in every country there is little hostility to the British on the part of the

*For Haldane's praise of this see p. 94.

Germans, and on the other hand, there is in England no dislike of Germany."*

The other was from the *Evening News* of 17th October, 1913. The assertion there was:

> "We all acknowledge the Kaiser as a very gallant gentleman, whose word is better than many another man's bond, a guest whom we are always glad to welcome and sorry to lose, a ruler whose ambitions for his own people are founded on as good right as are our own."

Of course such quotations proved nothing (except the inadvisability of charging the *Westminster* with being pro-German), and of course Spender realised that, if Northcliffe did not. "Let us say in conclusion," the *Westminster* wrote on 24th February, "that we attach not the smallest importance to all these quotations. We have shown that the digging up of past utterances is a silly game, at which two parties can play, and in which we have nothing to fear." But the question (as with Dr. Johnson on a historic occasion) was which would get tired first, and strangely enough it was Northcliffe. He sent a message to Spender declaring that he had the greatest respect for him, and couldn't they dine together and talk the situation over? They did not dine, but Spender had little desire to pursue a newspaper wrangle further in the middle of a great war. He had shown by his leaders and other articles (for his pen can be clearly detected in some of these) through that fevered week how capable he was of hitting hard without ever failing to hit cleanly, and it was not he who had proposed to break the battle off. He could be well content to leave the field as it was. Northcliffe, for his part, put the matter from his mind and cleared his decks for whatever foray his impulses might next dictate. Spender, rather surprisingly, seems at one point to have considered proceedings against Northcliffe for libel, for on 25th February St. Loe Strachey wrote to him from the *Spectator*: "My inclination is always for taking people into Court where there is a real libel, but I expect on the whole your legal advisers are right in saying there is nothing actionable here."

Spender, incidentally, obtained a verdict on the whole affair

*It would appear from a private letter that Robert Donald, of the *Daily Chronicle*, put the *Westminster* on to this.

from an expert jury. In a letter to Mrs. Spender dated February 21st he writes:

> "I eavesdropped on a discussion between reporters in the House this afternoon as to whether *The Times* or the *Westminster* had got the best of it. One said I was too mild, as you may possibly think, but the other three said it was exactly right. Anyhow I propose to give them another dose to-morrow."

The dose has already been described.

Spender only speaks of meeting Northcliffe once after the 1916 interchange. It was a chance encounter on a railway journey in 1920 or 1921, but the conversation that took place has some slight historical interest, for in the course of it Northcliffe indignantly denied the current suggestion that his quarrel with Lloyd George was due to the refusal of his request for a seat at the Peace Conference. The originators of the report, he said, knew perfectly well that in the early months of 1919 he was threatened with a serious operation, and required by his doctor to submit himself to complete rest in preparation for it. Whom he regarded as the originators of the report Northcliffe apparently did not say, but it may be noted that in his *Truth About the Peace Conference* Mr. Lloyd George wrote:* "As soon as the War was over he [Northcliffe] conceived the idea that he must be one of the official delegates at the Peace Conference. For many reasons that was obviously impossible."

A year or so later, in 1922, Northcliffe died. Spender's *Westminster*, and his editorship, had already ended.

Chapter XI

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

When Spender published his *Fifty Years of Europe* in 1933 he knew as much about the subject he was dealing with as any man in England. As a journalist he had been studying and discussing foreign affairs for nearly half a century. He had written the standard biographies of the two Liberal Prime Ministers† who held office

*Vol. I, p. 268.

†*The Life of Lord Oxford* jointly with Sir Cyril Asquith, but Spender was responsible for all the political chapters.

successively for eleven vital years before and during the First German War. He was on intimate terms with an ex-Foreign Secretary, Lord Rosebery, and still more intimate with Sir Edward Grey, who controlled the Foreign Office from the end of 1905 to the end of 1916; and later he collaborated closely with Grey in the preparation of the latter's autobiographical *Twenty-Five Years*. He had studied exhaustively both the *British Documents on the Origins of the War* and (as relatively few Englishmen had) the German *Grosse Politik der Europaischen Kabinette*, which covers the ground as far back as 1871. (Spender was sent the whole set of 54 volumes by Count Wolf-Metternich, the former German Ambassador in London, and ultimately presented them to the Reform Club Library). What was still rarer, he had been through the Austrian official documents as well.

Events of moment were, of course, happening during his earlier journalistic days, but a paper like the *Eastern Morning News* has necessarily to devote so much space to local and home news that there is little scope for a specialist in the foreign field, even if the potential specialist—the editor—with his multifarious duties, had leisure to assume the double role. In any case those were years in which, with Lord Salisbury at the Foreign Office pursuing a policy of isolation, British diplomacy was not particularly active. It is from Spender's move to London in 1891 and his appointment to the *Westminster* in 1892 that his intensive study of foreign governments and their policy dates, though as it happened the first major problem he had to deal with was less foreign than colonial. He and Mrs. Spender were spending Christmas, 1895, with Lord Justice Vaughan Williams and his family at High Ashes, Leith Hill. But for Spender the visit was interrupted. Meeting at High Ashes someone whom he describes simply as "a chance acquaintance", who gave him startling news about impending events in Cape Colony and the Transvaal (it may or may not be irrelevant that Miss Flora Shaw, subsequently Lady Lugard, who knew more about South African politics than anyone else in England outside official circles, lived less than half a mile from High Ashes and was a constant visitor there), he hurried precipitately back to the office in preparation for whatever might happen. What did happen, of course, on the last day of the year, was the Jameson Raid. Cook, in the month that intervened before he handed over the editorship of the *Westminster*, commented mildly on the affair, Spender, as soon as he assumed the reins, in language much more severe. When Cecil Rhodes came to London Spender discussed the outlook with

him; he attended all the public sittings of the Committee of Enquiry into the raid; in 1898 he met Sir Alfred Milner at a dinner given to celebrate Milner's appointment to the High Commissionership in South Africa, and again a little later at a private lunch with Stead; and early in 1899 he talked over the whole situation with Dr. Jameson, and was shocked at the irresponsibility of the latter's conviction that Kruger could be bluffed by a threat of war into conceding the Uitlanders' demands.

Then came Milner's demand for "intervention", which the *Westminster* vigorously opposed. But intervention, in other words war, came, and Spender had to take his line. It was one which gave little satisfaction to either of the two sections into which the Liberal Party was now split. Once Kruger had sent his ultimatum, the *Westminster* realised that war was inevitable and acquiesced, but not emphatically enough to please the Liberal Imperialists, who furthermore regarded as weak and untimely Spender's periodical reminders that however the war went the settlement must take account of the fact that Boers and Britons in South Africa would have somehow to live together; while the fact that he tolerated the war at all—though sharply criticising the Government's conduct of it—completed alienated the so-called pro-Boer element. The split in the party, indeed, concerned Spender hardly less than the war itself, and, assailed though he might be by both wings, he was still sufficiently in touch with each of them to attempt the task of conciliation. But his success was not conspicuous, and the Peace of Vereeniging in 1902 found the Imperialists and the Little Englanders glaring at each other from their respective tabernacles. One word may be added. In July 1909, seven years after the war, Spender dined with General Botha at the Hyde Park Hotel. The invitation survives among Spender's papers, and in the corner of the first page he has written "Botha said to me as I was leaving, 'Three words made peace and union in South Africa—Methods of barbarism'."*

Though for a decade and more before 1914 anxiety about Germany's intentions was the outstanding preoccupation of British Foreign Ministers, that was not so in the years immediately before and after the turn of the century. Then the potential antagonist

*The words were originally used by Campbell-Bannerman, at the National Reform Union luncheon in June 1901, of the concentration camps set up by the British for Boer women and children whose farms had been burned. Botha's meaning was that his countrymen hailed the expression as evidence that there was an important political section in Britain with understanding and sympathy for the Boers' sufferings.

was France. Our colonial interests and hers were clashing in three continents, and when Captain Marchand went to Fashoda in 1898 the situation created might easily have ended in war. Four years earlier hostilities—over Siam—had been even nearer, and Spender records the shock he received (it was his second year in the editorial chair of the *Westminster*) when a Liberal Minister told him one evening that the country might well be at war the next day. He himself, in his habitual role of what he described as "smoother", was trying so far as he could to keep in touch with and understand French opinion, at the same time seeking in the *Westminster* to minimise obstacles to a reasonable accord between the two countries. Such an accord was achieved in 1904 by a Conservative Foreign Secretary (Lord Lansdowne), whose achievement the Liberal *Westminster* applauded warmly.

Unfortunately the Anglo-French entente soon came to be regarded by Germany, intent on keeping any possible opponents divided, almost as a hostile act, and in 1905 the spectacular appearance of the Kaiser at Tangier in obvious challenge to the French predominance in Morocco, just recognised by Britain in return for French recognition of British predominance in Egypt, made what may be termed the German question the outstanding issue in European politics. Spender was from the first alive to its possibilities. He had warmly approved the entente with France, but he was in close touch at this time with the one English statesman, Lord Rosebery, who had doubts about it. Most of Spender's discussions with Rosebery took place in the course of their weekly walks in Kensington Gardens, which explains why there is little documentary evidence of the ex-Premier's (and ex-Foreign Secretary's) views, but two letters quoted elsewhere in this volume* demonstrate clearly his conviction that, in his own words, "the Anglo-French agreement was much more likely to lead to complications than to peace." Spender, at first at any rate, did not think that; neither he nor anyone else had at that moment any reason for attributing to Germany the characteristics she subsequently disclosed.

But from 1904, certainly from 1905, Germany was the chief preoccupation of anyone concerned with shaping, or discussing, British foreign policy. No journalist then and in the years immediately following was writing more about foreign policy than Spender, and he was in a better position than most people to write with knowledge. His friendship with Grey, though it never gave

*p. 115.

him private information denied to other journalists, gave him valuable "background" and authoritative assessments of the current situation. Even if at this date he was no longer lunching once a fortnight with Haldane he was sufficiently close to the Minister to whom, as Secretary for War, foreign affairs were a direct concern to derive considerable light from that quarter to add to the light derived from Grey. And with all the Ambassadors of the Greater Powers in London he was on easy terms—the French, Paul Cambon; the Russian, Count Benckendorff; the German, Count Metternich (and his Counsellor of Embassy, von Kühlmann), and later Prince Lichnowsky; the Austrian, Count Mensdorff; and a succession of distinguished Americans, from John Hay to Walter Hines Page. Regarding this period a passage from Spender's *Life, Journalism and Politics** is pertinent.

> "Two occasions come back to me with special clearness from the autumn of this year (1905). One was a dinner given to Cambon by Grey at Brooks's, at which Haldane and I were the other guests; the other a dinner given by Haldane to Metternich, at which Grey, Asquith and I were the other guests. At the first we discussed the French side of the affair, at the other the German. Cambon was very serious, and even then feeling his way to discover what a Liberal Government would do if it came into power. Grey was forthcoming but non-committal; and Cambon had to be content with the assurance that Liberal sympathies were all on the side of friendship with France, and that if a Liberal Government came to power there would be the same desire as before to make a success of the Entente. The evening with Metternich was more searching, because he spoke perfect English and we were more eloquent in our own tongue. We sat till near midnight going in detail over the whole ground, and the various causes of quarrel which we alleged against the Germans or they against us. Metternich conceded nothing and we thought him rather stubborn, but the occasion provided much food for thought."

The Liberals, it must be remembered, were at this time still in opposition. A few weeks later the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary for War might well have considered such free exchanges incompatible with their responsibilities.

*Vol. I, p. 191.

A journalist who forms one of so intimate a company, while not entitled to quote or refer explicitly to the table-talk, is perfectly free to voice whatever conclusions may have emerged from his interpretation of it. This, after the Grey and Haldane dinners, Spender did, in an article in the *Fortnightly Review* (since he desired to write at greater length than space-conditions in the *Westminster* allowed) which achieved a *succès de scandale* in Berlin. The Kaiser was several times referred to in terms attuned rather to English than to German readers' sensibilities—at any rate to one august German reader's—and long afterwards Spender heard how the article, pasted page by page on large sheets of paper, with Wilhelm II's irate comments in the margin, travelled unwelcomed from department to department in various Government offices up and down the Wilhelmstrasse.

Meanwhile the Liberal Government came in, and military conversations between the British and French General Staffs—initiated under the outgoing Government, and a natural enough sequel to Germany's sabre-rattling in Morocco—proceeded. Spender knew of them, though most of the Cabinet did not. He is careful to say expressly that the information did not come from Grey (his informant was possibly enough Colonel Repington, who had done much behind the scenes to get the conversations started, and who had at one time been Spender's Military Correspondent on the *Westminster*) and he regarded the conversations as an almost inevitable outcome of the situation German provocation had created. But he studiously refrained from taking an anti-German line. On the contrary, the more serious the tension between Britain and Germany appeared, the more essential he conceived it to be to exert every effort to smooth difficulties out and achieve some sort of working understanding—an endeavour which from time to time secured him the label of pro-German in the more chauvinistic Fleet Street offices.

How far the views Spender voiced were genuinely reciprocated in Germany is matter for speculation rather than dogmatism. At any rate they were approved in various reputable quarters, and in 1907 an important friendship mission of British editors to Germany was arranged on the invitation of German editors who had visited Britain in the previous year. Spender was among the guests,* and the visit was a notable event for him. It was a tribute to his personal and professional standing that his colleagues chose him as

*They included W. T. Stead, Sidney Low of the *Standard*, A. G. Gardiner of the *Daily News* and J. S. R. Phillips of the *Yorkshire Post*.

the chief British speaker at the principal banquet—a highly elaborate and impressive affair—at Berlin. Spender has described this and other incidents of the trip in his *Life, Journalism and Politics*, but his immediate reactions are better indicated in three letters to Mrs. Spender at home. The first, dated 27th May is from Bremen:

"I sent you off two postcards from our luncheon-table to-day, partly to please our host—the chief newspaper-proprietor in these parts and a very affable gentleman—who had escorted me in (arm-in-arm if you please, like partners at a London dinner) and treated me as the chief guest—somewhat to my embarrassment before the others. We had a wonderful meal in an extremely picturesque 15th century building—imagine a mixture of a Greenwich fish dinner and a lunch at the Ritz—in an Elizabethan panelled hall with a minstrels' gallery in it. To-night we go to an equally ancient Rathhaus. . . . The people who receive us have taken enormous pains with this thing. I am sure it isn't all bunkum; nobody could put their hearts into bunkum in just this way."

The second, the next day, is from Hamburg:

"We wound up our day at Bremen with a banquet given by the Senate in the most beautiful old hall I ever saw. A most picturesque entertainment. I sat to the left of the chairman (our President having now arrived) and that gave great umbrage to an awful donkey who considered the place was due to him. He fought about it all the evening and made ever such a dust, but the rest sympathised with me and said the place was my due. To-day I went and altered the names before lunch and put him in my place, which caused much amusement to the party and enormous satisfaction to him. The special attention which the German Committee pay me is really rather embarrassing, and I am afraid may cause jealousies. I can't help it—for many reasons don't want it—but there is probably official prompting behind the proceedings, and I rather think Metternich has written to Berlin suggesting some of this.

Finally an account of the culminating feature of the whole tour, the dinner in the great hall of the Zoological Gardens, with Spender as the principal British speaker.

"I had a great success last night," he wrote on May 30th. "The greatest public dinner I ever was at—half the Government present, our Ambassador and very distinguished people like Harnack and Delbrück. It frightened me horribly at first, that enormous hall and 600 people at dinner. But my speech 'went' from the beginning, and one phrase in it* appears to be in everyone's mouth to-day. The Ambassador sent me a special congratulation, and I am weltering in tubs of butter. The newspaper reports are fuller than I shall ever get again in my life. I am to see the Chancellor separately on Saturday."

These letters—Spender, of course, would never have dreamed of writing thus of his own success to anyone but his wife—are worth quoting at some length, both because of the importance of the part it fell to Spender to play and as evidence of the sincerity of his belief in the possibility of Anglo-German friendship till the irresistible compulsion of events dispelled it. But there were other notable, and singular, incidents to follow before the tour ended. On the day after the Berlin banquet the British journalists went to Potsdam as the guests of the Kaiser, whose birthday it happened to be. There was a birthday review, then a lunch, and after that the Emperor, on an immense horse, received the British guests. Spender was the first to be presented, and it proved to be by no means a formal ceremony. Standing by the head of the towering steed, he was subjected to an allocution compounded of interrogation and injunction. It began normally with a natural question about the visitors' impressions; that could be answered both complimentarily and truthfully. Then a sharp, almost antagonistic, question: "Why don't Englishmen come to Germany?" Spender replied with justice that a good many of them did. "But not to Berlin. Why not to Berlin?" The answer was the same—that a good many did. But not important people; what important people had been? Spender suggested a few, but with the exception of Haldane they failed completely to fill the bill. Then the real grievance found utterance. Sir Edward Grey had never been. "Go home and tell Grey to come." There being no obvious reply to that, the conversation momentarily languished and Spender, supposing it

*Apparently a passage in which Spender drew the inference, from remarks which the German Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs had made a few minutes before, that the worst of the naval competition was over, and the two countries might look forward to a period in which their relations would not be complicated by that cause of friction.

finished, moved off—which he subsequently discovered was *le plus faux de faux pas*. Grey, to whom the mandate was duly transmitted, decided that the atmosphere of Whitehall was more conducive to the considered treatment of Anglo-German problems than the atmosphere of Potsdam.

The interview with the Chancellor, Prince Bülow, to which Spender referred in his third letter home, was of considerable importance both for the content of the conversation and for the fact that at the end of it Spender was brought face to face with the former *éminence grise* of successive German Chancellors, the Anglophobe von Holstein. The encounter threatened awkwardly, for Holstein was anxious to challenge his visitor on the latter's *Fortnightly* article of a year or two before, to which, as has been mentioned, the Kaiser himself had given hostile attention. Bülow, however, diplomatically turned the talk to English literature, and Holstein, who spoke English perfectly, reconciled himself to discussing Kipling.

But before that Spender and the Chancellor had talked for some time and of many subjects. Prince Bülow, having transmitted a message from the Emperor embodying the emphatic assurance that not a man in Germany had the faintest idea of attacking England, asked numerous questions about English public men and English Parliamentary practice. More important was what he had to say about Germany—in particular, in the light of later events, his assertion that so far from the German population increasing to a point at which territorial expansion was necessary, Germany had not sufficient population, and was compelled to try to import labour. It was a conspicuously friendly, and on the face of it a reassuring, interview, and it concluded with a warm invitation to Spender to come to Berlin again, with the certainty of finding all doors open to him.

So the visit to Germany ended. The question was what to make of it all. It was impossible, Spender had written, to think it nothing but bunkum. Yet the year was 1907, the year in which (though neither Spender nor anyone outside the Foreign Office knew it till twenty years later) Sir Eyre Crowe addressed to the Foreign Secretary his historic memorandum on the menacing elements in German foreign policy. Spender undoubtedly was right in believing and hoping for the best till he saw clear evidence that his belief was an illusion, and in endeavouring in the meantime to bridge gulfs and avoid causes of provocation. What would have been culpable was blind credulity, and he was never open to that

charge. For him the test was Germany's ambitions on the ocean. It was essential in those pre-war years, he told a Chatham House audience in 1935, that the British Navy should be equal to any probable combination against it. The German Navy Law of 1900 and the extensive building programme it authorised had called that supremacy gravely in question, but words spoken at the Berlin banquet, in presence of the Navy Minister, von Tirpitz, seemed, as has been seen, to indicate the end of the naval competition. That illusion was short-lived. The new Navy Law of the very next year, 1908, authorising a substantial increase in naval construction, changed the whole situation for Spender, and during the conflict in the British Cabinet in 1909 between the First Lord of the Admiralty, McKenna, who insisted on laying down six (ultimately eight) new Dreadnoughts, and other Ministers like Lloyd George and Churchill who would not hear of more than four, the *Westminster* gave the First Lord unwavering support.

But before 1909 came 1908, and in 1908 a number of things happened, apart from the new German Navy Law, which caused experienced observers of the international outlook like Spender grave apprehension. It was the year of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria (in defiance of the provisions of the Treaty of Berlin), the year of the publication of the notorious interview with the Kaiser in the *Daily Telegraph* and of the despatch of a surprising personal letter by the Kaiser to Lord Tweedmouth, the First Lord of the Admiralty. And in the course of the year Spender had two instructive discussions with M. Isvolsky, the Russian Foreign Minister, who was visiting London, and the German Ambassador, Count Metternich. Isvolsky, after some shrewd questions about British Parliamentary procedure, as a guide to the adolescent Duma, turned to the subject perennial with all Russian Foreign Ministers, the opening of the Dardanelles to Russian warships. The existing situation, he urged—in a *tête-à-tête* conversation with Spender after lunch—"was intolerable to Russia, since she was compelled to build three separate fleets, one in the Baltic, one at Vladivostok, and one in the Black Sea, the two first being ice-bound during a considerable part of the year. Moreover, building at Vladivostok meant constant friction and possible attack from Japan. Russia's object (he said quite frankly) was to be able to send the Black Sea fleet through the Suez Canal to the Far East if she desired to do so". Spender here made the obvious comment that Great Britain, as the ally of Japan, could hardly be expected to view that project with enthusiasm, a point of view which

Isvolsky so far recognised as to agree that it would be as well not to proclaim Russia's intentions from the house-tops. To Spender's further suggestion that it would be only equitable, if Russian warships were to pass outwards through the Straits, that warships of other nations should pass inwards through them, Isvolsky replied with emphasis that the two cases were quite different.

The question of the Straits was pressed with insistence, and with arguments designed to appeal to an English Liberal. Isvolsky (here I quote from a note made by Spender at the time) "represented himself as having fought hard for the Anglo-Russian understanding against the reactionaries, and said that his policy would receive the severest check if he could not solve the Straits question with our assistance. The reactionaries, he assured me, were against him on the Straits question. Their policy was to write Europe off, keep the doors closed to the Mediterranean, and turn east. They mistrusted all relations with the Western Powers as tending to liberalise Russia, and would be glad to see him beaten, and especially to be able to say that he had been beaten by England. He appealed therefore to Englishmen who sympathised with the Liberal movement in Russia, and wished her to be brought into line with the Western Powers, not to desert him in this matter. He claimed to stand with Stolypin as a Liberal and reformer in the domestic policies of Russia, and said he had been responsible for one of the great advances in the constitutional movement when he insisted on submitting foreign affairs to the Duma".

This conversation, in which there was little to reassure an English journalist (even if the Minister had made a better personal impression on the journalist than he did) took place on October 14th. Nine days later came a still more significant talk with Metternich, the German Ambassador, who sent Spender an urgent invitation to dine with him at short notice. The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (the sovereignty of which was Turkish, though the provinces had for years by agreement been under Austrian occupation) by Austria had been proclaimed on October 6th. The action upset the whole equilibrium of Europe, and agitated particularly Turkey, whose sovereignty was encroached on, and Russia, to whom the Slavs of the Balkan Peninsula made immediate appeal as the natural protector of Slav rights everywhere. Germany, of course, was bound to stand by her ally Austria. Sir Edward Grey pressed for a conference of the European Great Powers to regularise whatever arrangement might be finally reached. This

situation was the subject of Metternich's representations to Spender. Like many German diplomats in those days, he oscillated between a querulous and a truculent mood (due much more, probably, to his instructions than to his natural temperament). Germany's desire, like Austria's, was of course to get the *fait accompli* accepted, and she was annoyed at Great Britain's refusal to concur in that. Britain, Metternich complained, was trying to get the affair settled by herself, France and Russia over everyone else's heads. The English newspapers were writing outrageously about Germany, particularly *The Times*. Austria had no intention of appearing in the dock at the conference which Grey wanted to convene. As for British criticisms of Austria, "he did not doubt that the moral emotions of the British people were in their way genuine, but British statesmen knew how to manipulate them, and to turn them on and turn them off according to their convenience, e.g. they stopped the indignation at 'Russian atrocities' so soon as good relations with Russia became part of British policy. He heard much of the independence of the English, as contrasted with the German, Press, but after living several years in England he had come to the conclusion that the British was the most 'controllable' Press in Europe".

This was foolish and flamboyant stuff, by no means in keeping with Metternich's normal conversation, and Spender of course consistently demurred to his allegations. The whole thing belongs now to past history, but past history has its bearing on future. That is specially true of what appears to have been the closing passage in the conversation. "We talked," wrote Spender in his memorandum of the interview, "about the military strengths of the various Powers, and Metternich said that Austria could easily defeat Russia, and would simply destroy Servia if she gave trouble. The Russian Slavs might grow very angry, but they would have to get across Roumania and Hungary before they could help the Serbs, and that was impossible." This was on October 23rd, 1908. From then to the date of the Austrian ultimatum to Servia—July 23rd, 1914—was just five years and nine months.

Through those six years, or rather less, the danger of war with Germany was perpetually weighing on the mind of any publicist who could see, and understand, what was happening beneath the surface of events. The General Staffs of Britain and France (as Spender knew, though the majority of the Cabinet did not) were in constant touch, and the battle over the eight Dreadnoughts was raging in the Cabinet and the country, Spender, as has been said,

standing unhesitatingly for the execution of the full programme put forward by the First Lord and reasoning in private letters with opponents of the eight-ship programme like Mr. Lloyd George. At the same time he was giving every support in his power to Haldane's Territorial Army scheme, not only in the columns of the *Westminster* but as a member of the London County Territorial Association, which he joined at the instance of Lord Esher, its chairman, in 1908. That involved defending the voluntary method against Lord Roberts and other advocates of conscription, who necessarily looked coldly on a system whose success would make their own form of military service superfluous. Spender discussed the situation several times with Roberts, for whom he conceived a warm personal regard, without being in any way moved by his arguments. Nor did the arguments carry weight with the Government till, in the second year of the coming war, every man available had to be secured for some form of military service. Till the war the Territorial movement prospered, and the mobilisation of the Territorials in August 1914 made possible the immediate despatch of six divisions of the regular army to France.

In 1911 a light interlude preceded a storm. In May of that year the Kaiser, in London for the coronation of King George V, lunched with Haldane at his house in Queen Anne's Gate. Spender was one of a small company which included Kitchener, Curzon, Morley, Ramsay MacDonald and Edmund Gosse. The conversation seems to have been strictly non-political, the Emperor discoursing to the company in general on theology and to Spender individually on the Dordogne caves. Two months later, when Germany sent the gunboat *Panther* to Agadir, on the west coast of Morocco, as a rejoinder to France's despatch of troops to Fez to suppress disorders there, France and Germany, and in consequence Britain and Germany, were brought to the very edge of war. That, at least, was the view taken by Metternich, the German Ambassador, who told Spender one day in July that "he thought it possible, even probable, that our two countries would be at war before the week was over". They were not in fact at war as soon as that; three years of uneasy peace still remained; the Morocco quarrel was patched up, with territorial compensation for Germany further south at France's expense. But one more warning had been sounded. The inevitability of war was accentuated. In those circumstances Spender's convictions on Britain's duty were clear. We must at all costs keep our supremacy at sea or lay our coasts open to invasion. That meant that under no conditions could the

French fleet or the French Channel ports be allowed to fall into German hands. And that in turn meant something very near a policy of supporting France right or wrong. To that Spender reconciled himself, even with the complications which France's alliance with Russia might entail, and even though his support of a strong-navy programme exposed him to hot criticism on the part of a certain school of Liberals.

One Liberal of that school, indeed, criticised him on other grounds. Lord Loreburn, the Lord Chancellor, happened at about this time to come into McKenna's room at the House of Commons when the First Lord and Spender were discussing relations with Germany, and touching in that connection on the Staff talks with France. Hearing this Loreburn flared up and demanded to know why a mere journalist was being told secrets of which even he, a Cabinet Minister and Lord Chancellor, was not cognisant. There was some reason for the protest, but Spender had known of the talks for years, not, clearly, as the result of any improper disclosure, and there is force in his comment that a Cabinet Minister must have been either singularly trustful or singularly indifferent to great events, if after successive crises like Tangier and Agadir he asked no questions as to what provision was being made for joint action by Britain and France in case of need.

Reference was made above to the inevitability of war between Britain and Germany. That perhaps is too strong a term, though its use is natural in a narrative written in the light of events. In 1912 and 1913 there was some relaxation of the international tension. A leading Cabinet Minister, indeed, declared in January 1914 that he had never known the outlook in Europe more hopeful. Haldane's mission to Berlin in 1912 had, it is true, led to nothing—no one had much expected it to lead to anything—but the insulation of the Balkan wars of that year and the next, and the success of the conference of the Ambassadors of the Great Powers in London in 1913 under Grey's chairmanship, showed that the possibility of avoiding war still existed. During the earlier part of this period, the first half of 1912, Spender was in India. When he returned, and for some time afterwards, domestic affairs, particularly the Home Rule question and the Government's social reform programme, were calculated to engross a journalist's attention more than foreign. The war of 1914, it must be remembered, broke out of a comparatively clear sky. Relations with Germany had sensibly improved. Agreement had been almost reached over the Baghdad railway and the contingent reversion

of the Portuguese colonies. No one could have foreseen the murder of the Archduke Ferdinand at Serajevo on June 28th. No one, or very few, foresaw such a sequel to the murder as the Austrian ultimatum to Servia on July 23rd. And not many believed at first that even that would plunge Europe in war.

In the earlier months of 1914 Spender was in fairly constant touch with von Kühlmann, then Counsellor of the German Embassy in London and subsequently for a short time State Secretary. Their talk was not about immediate alarms, for there were at that time no immediate alarms, but in April Kühlmann invited Spender to dinner to meet Professor Schiemann, a well-known German historian notorious for his anti-Russian views, who launched into a violent disquisition on Russia's preparations for an attack on Germany, culminating in the question whether Britain could conceivably make common cause with such barbarians. Such a conversation naturally takes a colour from subsequent events, but at the time—April 1914—there was no reason to attach any excessive significance to it. Three months later, as the prospect darkened, the importance which both the Central Powers attached to Spender was repeatedly demonstrated. On July 15th, between two and three weeks after the Serajevo murder, and eight days before the Austrian ultimatum, he was visited by Baron (now Sir George) Franckenstein, anxious apparently to urge him not to encourage Servia to resist, whatever demands might be made on her; to which Spender replied very naturally that that must depend on the nature of the demands. The next night came a call from a Secretary of the German Embassy concerned to assure, or warn, Spender that come what might Germany would stand by her ally.

Of Spender's general policy in the tense days that followed all that need be said is that in all essentials it was identical with Grey's—which meant working for peace even against hope till the very moment when the first shot was fired. For the journalist and the Minister alike the equivalent of that shot was the German invasion of Belgium—or rather, as Spender points out, Belgium's resolve to resist invasion, for if she had decided to give Germany unopposed passage across her territory it would have been hard to withstand that section of British opinion, including a substantial section of the Cabinet, which was protesting that Britain could not be more Belgian than the Belgians. Spender's reply to a note of Bryce's on this subject has been quoted already.* Two days before the Germans crossed the Belgian frontier a communication reached

*p. 38.

him from no less a personage than the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, begging for the insertion in the *Westminster* of the instructions (copy attached) just sent from Berlin to Vienna urging Austria to negotiate with Russia, and warning her that the Germans would not be drawn into a world war by an ally that disregarded their advice. The decision whether to print such a message had to be taken quickly, for the final edition of that day's paper was ready for the machines. Spender did print it, and it cannot be doubted that he was right. We were not then at war with Germany. Unless the message was spurious, which there was not the slightest ground for thinking, it was news, and important news. An editor is not justified, without overwhelming reason, in withholding important news from his readers.

It did not fall to the *Westminster* to announce war with Germany, for the hour when peace ended was midnight (by German time; 11 p.m. by ours); that was news for the morning papers. It was an unforgettable night for Spender, as for half England, and so was the one before it. On August 3rd he was with Grey at the Foreign Office, and it was to him that the Foreign Secretary, looking out of the window across St. James's Park, used the now historic words: "The lamps are going out all over Europe, and we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime." The next night Spender walked across the Horse Guards Parade towards the Admiralty with Winston Churchill, who was then First Lord. "At midnight," Churchill said, "we shall be at war. Think of it if you can—the fleet absolutely ready, with instructions for every ship, and the word going out from that tower at midnight." At midnight it went out. Foreign policy passed into the hands of soldiers and sailors for the next four years.

On one point only Spender took on the outbreak of war a line which he subsequently recognised was mistaken. He urged that the Expeditionary Force should not be sent across the Channel till the seas had been made safe, and the danger of invasion removed, by the defeat of the German fleet in battle—a contention which was subsequently brought up against him by Northcliffe. But he did not argue thus without justification, as a letter three years later from Haldane indicates.

> "What you write," says Haldane in a communication of considerable interest and importance, "about the First Sea Lord objecting to transport the Expeditionary Force in 1911 [i.e. during the Agadir crisis] before the fleet had established com-

mand of the sea is of course quite accurate. But the doctrine was a novel one. The Admiralty had two years earlier undertaken the transport and had worked out the tables with the Army Staff. Why they should have come to think in 1911 that they must begin by winning a great battle at sea and could not command the Channel till then they never explained in the Cte of Defence. But it did come out that Wilson*—following ideas of Fisher's—had made out a plan (of which he had not told his First Lord) of using troops for dumping down on Northern German shores. As soon as this was stated the Generals riddled it. No one who had the smallest idea of the power of strategical combination which was embodied in the German railway system would have even suggested it. The moral was that for want of a proper War Staff the Admiralty could make no useful plans for amphibious warfare. Moreover such a staff would have known that the delay which they desired over the transportation of the Ex. Force would have been fatal to its use. Rapidity in mobilisation was essential if the Northern Channel ports were to be saved. When Prince Louis became First Sea Lord he saw all this and made no difficulty about undertaking the rapid and immediate transport on which every chance depended."

Prince Louis had succeeded Sir Francis Bridgeman as First Sea Lord in 1913. Spender had evidently not heard that his advent meant a change of view about the Expeditionary Force. Actually the whole force was landed in France by August 18th.

Strictly speaking there is a certain inappropriateness in dealing with Spender's activities during the war years, when foreign affairs were in abeyance, in a chapter bearing the heading "Foreign Affairs", but it is on the whole convenient to follow chronological order in this case. First and foremost, of course, Spender edited the *Westminster*, expressing on various outstanding issues views which, judged dispassionately ten or a dozen years later, were rarely found to have been mistaken. He moved vigorously in the early days of August to get Kitchener, who was starting back to his post in Egypt, stopped at Dover; how far the urgent note he sent in to McKenna during a Cabinet meeting was a determining factor he was never quite certain; it was enough for him that what he wanted happened, and Kitchener was brought back to London and the War Office. Spender supported him as Secretary for War in all

*Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, then First Sea Lord.

essentials, particularly in his endeavours to get the necessary recruits for the army by voluntary effort. His own position, as he stated it to various advocates of immediate compulsion, was that the decision must rest with the Government, which alone knew all the relevant facts. As for himself and the *Westminster*, as soon as the Government declared compulsion to be necessary, they would acquiesce, and support the policy. Till then they gave full backing to Kitchener's various appeals, and later to the Derby scheme, which constituted the last attempt to obviate the necessity of conscription. The publication in November 1917 of Lord Lansdowne's historic letter pressing for a declaration of moderate war-aims raised essentially contentious questions of policy. Spender, unlike *The Times* and most London papers, thought the letter timely and urged that its proposals should be given serious consideration.

Of the war itself Spender saw something at close quarters, visiting the front—not merely G.H.Q. but the forward trenches—once or twice a year as the guest of Sir Douglas Haig, and going on to see the French armies as well; he was at Verdun when it was under continuous German fire. The articles he wrote after one such visit, in 1917, were republished in pamphlet form under the title "From the Meuse to the Somme". As is indicated elsewhere, he supported the Government against Northcliffe on the question of defence against Zeppelins, and he defended Haig and Robertson with vigour and conviction against assaults by both politicians and journalists after the change of Government at the end of 1916.

But Spender's greatest service in the war, apart from his work in the *Westminster*, was the part he played in getting the chaos in the medical services in France straightened out. The story, which he tells at length in his *Life, Journalism and Politics*,* can only be summarised here. What he achieved was the more satisfying by reason of the close association of Mrs. Spender with it. Through her hospital at Tankerton she got hints, too definite and too numerous to ignore, of the breakdown of the Expeditionary Force medical services, and with astonishing promptitude, and an astonishingly successful disregard of the obstacles to the movement of civilians in the zone of military operations, she and Spender found themselves in Paris within a few days after the battle of the Marne. All Allied Ambassadors and Consuls had gone with the French Government to Bordeaux, but Spender found an invaluable collaborator in Mr. Myron Herrick, the American Ambassador (America being, of course, at that date a neutral). He began by

*Vol. II, Chap. xxii.

sending a message to Grey at the Foreign Office urging that the British Consulate in Paris be reopened, as it consequently was in a few days. Investigation confirmed all the rumours about the medical breakdown. "There was a shortage of everything," Spender wrote, "doctors, nurses, ambulances, hospital equipment." A visit to the Aisne revealed a complete absence of hospital trains for bringing the wounded from the front, casualties being carried in *fourgons* (freight-cars) roughly and most inadequately adapted for the immediate need. There were no base-hospitals, the intention having been to have all the wounded, however serious their condition, evacuated direct to England.

After a conference in Paris with some of the army medical authorities (acting, of course, unofficially) Spender drew up a memorandum setting out proposals for reform and sent it at once to Grey, his personal relations with the Foreign Secretary making that the most effective way of approach to the Cabinet. On the day of his return to London he met Grey and Haldane (then Lord Chancellor, but with his interest in army affairs as keen as ever) at Haldane's house. Wheels were set moving, and Spender indicated discreetly but plainly that if they were not kept moving he would have a sensational story to tell in the *Westminster*. Kitchener was, of course, the decisive factor. He was convinced, and the immediate result was the recall to his original post of Sir Alfred Keogh, the former Director of Army Medical Services, who had retired in 1910. The wheels therefore did move. Keogh was given the powers he needed, and all the reforms Spender had declared necessary were carried out. His activities had one odd sequel. One of the minor nuisances of the war was the congregation at Boulogne of a bevy of society ladies who, on the plea of entertaining the troops, were adequately entertaining themselves and occupying accommodation badly needed for relatives of the wounded and others, the general result being to impede the medical authorities considerably. Nothing was more calculated to anger Kitchener, and he decided a little sardonically that since this man Spender had chosen to concern himself with such things he should be called on to go over and purge Boulogne. And so it had to be. The orders Spender took were that all ladies without Red Cross qualifications or specially assigned duties should be summarily despatched home. He delivered his message, and before the reactions became publicly manifest escaped to the comparative tranquillity of the front.

That was not Spender's only association with medical breakdowns. When the Dardanelles campaign opened the same com-

plaints reached home about the inefficiency of the treatment of the wounded (just as happened a year later in the Mesopotamia campaign), and Spender went to see Keogh about it. The Director-General pointed in despair to a file dealing with the whole question, and explained the perambulation of departments it would have to undertake before it got to its ultimate destination, the Medical Department of the Admiralty. "Very well," said Spender, "if you will look the other way for a moment I will purloin the file and take it straight across to Balfour [who was then First Lord of the Admiralty]." Keogh gasped—and did look the other way. Spender seized the file, betook himself to the Admiralty, and when he found Balfour was not there pursued him to his house in Carlton Gardens. Balfour, when he heard what had happened gasped slightly too, but declared that Spender had been perfectly right, and commissioned him to complete his work by going (on Balfour's introduction) to impress the facts personally on the heads of the different departments concerned, with the result that once more the necessary reforms were carried out. There is no need to measure the success of Spender's representations in regard to France and the Dardanelles against W. H. Russell's in the Crimea, but there is more than a superficial resemblance between the two.

From the end of 1916, when Asquith was succeeded as Prime Minister by Lloyd George, the *Westminster* became an Opposition paper, so far as there was an Opposition in wartime. The story of the political manœuvres of the first week-end in December which saw the ousting of Asquith effected have been told repeatedly and from different angles in many biographies and autobiographies, and there is no need to retrace it here, for Spender had personally no part in any of the negotiations and encounters. His chief, perhaps his only, criticism of Asquith was that the Prime Minister's own habitual magnanimity blinded him to the possibility of disloyalty on the part of any of his colleagues and closed his ears to all warnings on the subject. It was after the change of Government that the attacks on Haig and Robertson multiplied, and Spender, as stated, defended the Commander-in-Chief and the C.I.G.S. vigorously. In the battle between "westerners" and "easterners" (the new Prime Minister being most conspicuous among the latter) Spender was a confirmed westerner throughout, being convinced that to transfer troops on any large scale from France to Salonica or some other eastern theatre might well mean the loss of the whole war.

In 1917, on one of his visits to Paris, Spender had a long talk

with Clemenceau, and at the same time made acquaintance with many of the Americans who were beginning to arrive in strength some weeks after America's entry into the war. In 1918 came the second disintegration of the Liberal Party, as a result of the Maurice debate in the House of Commons, arising from the action of Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice in publicly challenging statements the Prime Minister (Mr. Lloyd George) had made about the strength of the armies in France. Spender strongly supported Maurice and the handling of the question by Asquith in the House, but Lloyd George, by tactics which it will be sufficient to term adroit, got his majority on a division, and split the Liberal Party (already split once by the events of December 1916) into more fragments still. With the end of the war came the khaki election, and what Spender calls "the beating-up of passion on the eve of the Peace Conference, with the result that Lloyd George went to the Conference loaded with chains of his own making". Through all this Spender was one of a small minority striving in vain to stem an emotional tide which swept nearly all Conservatives and most Liberals off their feet.

With the coming of peace, or more properly with the signature of the Armistice, the politicians began once more to assert themselves in foreign affairs. The twenty-three years between the Treaty of Versailles and Spender's death formed a unity in a way that the twenty years or so before 1914 did not. It was a sequence of high hopes, disillusion, steady degeneration of international relations, with—down to 1936—no such clear-cut crises as those of Tangier in 1905 and Agadir in 1911. Spender (having a paper to edit) was not among the journalists who followed the proceedings of the Peace Conference on the spot, but he had some short talk with President Wilson at a State Banquet at Buckingham Palace before the conference opened and he visited Paris twice while it was in progress. He was, of course a convinced believer in the principles of the League of Nations, and during one of his Paris visits sat as member of an international conference of League of Nations Societies presided over by M. Léon Bourgeois, who was the chief representative of France on the Peace Conference Commission which was drafting the League of Nations Covenant. Spender's belief in the League never wavered. He consistently supported it in the *Westminster* and from time to time addressed League of Nations Union meetings; but as will be seen he was early alive to the danger of relying on law unsupported by force.

In one incident at the Peace Conference the *Westminster* played a curious and not unimportant part. Mr. Lloyd George, having won the General Election on a demand for the drastic treatment of Germany, adopted a much more moderate line at the Peace Conference itself. Addressing a gathering of the British Press in Paris he outlined an essentially reasonable peace programme; the gathering was private and not to be reported, but the *Westminster Gazette* correspondent (in whom Spender reposed a rather surprising degree of confidence; he took out letters of naturalisation as a Frenchman under the Vichy Government after 1940) sent home a despatch embodying the gist of the Prime Minister's statements, attributing them to "a high authority". The result was a concerted manifestation by right-wing Conservative M.P.'s, two hundred of whom sent the Prime Minister a telegram of protest couched in language so challenging as to compel him to come home and defend his policy on the floor of the House of Commons. Spender himself had little part in this, and he was disturbed that the *Westminster* had unwittingly made things difficult for Lloyd George at a time when his action was being determined by his better instincts.

The Peace Conference over, the Treaty of Versailles in force and the League of Nations in being, the world was thought to have passed into a new era of stability and hope. Spender had no reason for mistrusting the general optimism, but during 1920, in the vital period of transition to what was believed to be settled peace, he was away from the centre of things, having gone off to Egypt as a member of the Milner Mission. He professed no admiration for the peace settlement, but he excused it. "Enemies who played the game of war according to the old rules," he wrote in retrospect, "might salute each other and shake hands at the end, but warriors who discharge poison-gas, bomb open cities, sink without trace, kill and drown women and children, must not expect mercy when the end comes. Among other characteristics of the modern kind of warfare is that it makes a wise peace all but impossible." He himself stood now in a very different relation to the directors of foreign policy from that which he had enjoyed before the war. From the end of 1905 to the end of 1916 one of his close friends, Grey, was Foreign Secretary, and he was on terms not much less intimate with many other members of the Cabinet. At the same time he was the editor of an influential paper whose views on foreign affairs in particular carried recognised weight both at home and abroad. From the end of 1921, when the evening *Westminster* disappeared, all that was changed. The morning papers for which he successively

wrote gave him no comparable platform, and he claimed no more than a relatively casual acquaintance with the various Foreign Secretaries—Curzon, Ramsay MacDonald, Austen Chamberlain, Arthur Henderson—who held office between 1920 and 1930. Liberal journalist though he remained, he was devoting much of his time to work less ephemeral than falls to the lot of a daily paper journalist, particularly a daily paper journalist associated with a political party reduced, apparently indefinitely, to numerically negligible opposition.

Neither Spender's natural sagacity nor the force and reason of his writing had in any sense diminished, but the men who set most store on his wisdom were no longer in a position to exercise an influence on events. Even from some of these he differed on points of some importance. Like most Liberals he looked on the League of Nations as the best guarantee for the preservation of peace, but unlike many of them he was conscious of the grave danger of laying on the League tasks beyond its powers. A letter he wrote to me as late as 1940 emphasised principles which he had held and preached from a much earlier date. "It worries me a little," he said, "to see our intellectuals starting on paper constitutions, and apparently supposing that they have only to make them logical and consistent and watertight to make them work. . . . I almost despair of getting our Liberals and idealists to understand that, in the world as it is, it is every bit as important to get sufficient power behind the good causes as to convince ourselves that they are good. They will insist that the causes are betrayed by those who urge the necessity of their being sufficiently armed." In particular he was among the first to point out that the League ought never to impose economic sanctions unless it was prepared to face the war to which such sanctions would almost inevitably provoke the State against which they were directed.

Sympathetic towards France and unillusioned as regards Germany though he was, Spender considered the French had done Europe and the world an evil turn by their attitude in the matter of disarmament. At the Washington Disarmament Conference in 1921-2, which he attended as representative of the *Westminster* in its first month as a morning paper, the question arose whether the agreement already foreshadowed on naval disarmament could be supplemented by a similar agreement affecting land forces. President Harding was not a great man, but he was in a position which gave him a great opportunity, and there was some reason to believe that if a measure of land as well as naval disarmament

could be achieved at Washington he would use the moral stimulus thus generated to bring the United States into some form of League of Nations, and arrange a favourable settlement of Allied debts. Spender was satisfied that that was the President's aim, and he was convinced that the speech in which Briand at Washington waxed eloquent on the reasons why France could not disarm had destroyed the first hope, and a strong hope, that the United States might revoke the decision it took when it refused to enter the League in 1919. It is a theme I have many times heard Spender expound; he may have been right or wrong, but he believed himself very firmly to be right.

Foreign policy did not become an acutely contentious question in Great Britain for some ten years or more after the Treaty of Versailles was signed. In spite of the French occupation of the Ruhr, and discussions and disputes about reparations, the general international outlook was hopeful. The League of Nations was doing useful work and gathering strength; the Treaties of Locarno, followed by Germany's entry into the League and the harmonious co-operation established between Sir Austen Chamberlain, M. Briand and Dr. Stresemann, justified confidence that the differences between Germany and her former enemies might be settled peacefully. There was, it is true, already a National Socialist party in Germany, but the estimate of its importance then must not be measured in the light of after events; it troubled no one outside Germany in the later twenties. But in 1929 Stresemann died and Chamberlain went out of office. Internal difficulties, threatening external complications, increased in Germany; the economic and financial crisis throughout the world became acute; in September 1931 Britain went off the gold standard, and in the same month the first damaging blow at the League of Nations was struck with the Japanese occupation of Mukden.

From that moment the international situation deteriorated disastrously, and from that moment Spender found himself increasingly at variance with his more idealistic Liberal friends; by the time of Munich in 1938 the rift was wide enough to cause both him and them much pain. No one could accuse Spender of lack of idealism, but he knew to what disasters pursuit of the ideal in disregard of the practical could lead humanity. To those who demanded economic sanctions against Japan he insisted that it was foolhardy to resort to that form of pressure unless the League States were prepared to fight, for Japan would almost certainly meet economic sanctions with an attack on Hong Kong and Shanghai; that war with Japan

was out of the question unless, in addition to Britain, the United States and France were prepared to participate on a great scale; and that despite the advance America had made in sending a representative to sit with the League Council during the discussions on Japanese aggression there was never any indication that she would contribute a ship or a man to any armed action against Japan. He deplored the blow to the League's prestige, but it by no means destroyed his faith in the possibilities of Geneva. Four years after the Mukden coup, in May 1935, in an address at Chatham House on British foreign policy in the reign of George V, he ascribed the instability of Europe in great measure to the refusal of this country (whose policy was complicated by the aloofness of the Dominions from European affairs) to undertake definite commitments—a refusal of which France in particular made not unjust complaint. "Reasonable certainty," he said, "about the action of Great Britain and the British Empire is a condition of anything that can be called collective security. . . . A clear understanding that we shall be found in the path of peace-breakers and warmongers, and that we shall use all our influence for disarmament, seems to me to follow from any honest adherence to the League of Nations and the Kellogg Pact. It is the existence of these instruments which differentiates our situation now from our situation before the War."

He still believed such a policy was possible, and would succeed. But by 1935, when Italy attacked Abyssinia, the outlook was far darker, particularly when Italy's action was seen against the background of Hitler's repeated infractions of the Treaty of Versailles. From this point Spender held immovably to convictions which so much distressed his friends when he gave expression to them at the time of Munich. They were not entirely consistent with the approval he had given at Chatham House to the British Government's lead in the matter of disarmament, but from this time on he never swerved from them. The essence of his thesis was that Governments which were not prepared to go to war should not initiate measures which served as provocations to war. In May 1936 he wrote to *The Times* apropos of the Italian affair:

> "If (1) settlement by compromise is to be vetoed in the name of League principles, and (2) the League is unable to make these principles prevail, our last state will be worse than our first. We shall have lost the advantage of ordinary diplomacy, and gained none of the benefits of the new order. Europe, it seems

to me, is in extreme danger of falling between two stools."

Some fifteen months later, in August 1937, he writes in the same strain in a private letter to Dr. Gilbert Murray:

"Generally speaking what seems to me to have happened is that on each occasion we have slipped into the hole between the real and the ideal. We—or our Governments—have gone on to the eleventh hour in the belief that 'collective security' meant only the slight risk contemplated in the original idea of the Covenant, and then on discovering that the risk was that of a great war—for which we thought ourselves unprepared—have beaten a hasty retreat. This has deprived us of settlements on the old diplomatic model and failed to give us the far preferable settlements on League principles. . . . It is often necessary to accept a second-best policy; the moral disaster lies in pretending that it is the best, which is a peculiar and unnecessary vice of politicians. Plato thought it was wise to descend from the first-best idea of the *Republic* to the second-best practical constitution of the *Laws*, but he kept reminding us that the *Republic was* the best, even though for the time being it was the pattern laid up in heaven. I commend the illustration to the great Greek scholar as indicating the line for the League of Nations in these evil days."

All the time the clouds over Europe were growing blacker. In 1936 Hitler had sent troops into the Rhineland in defiance of the Treaty of Locarno, which he had expressly pledged himself to observe. In March 1938 he annexed Austria, and his intentions regarding Czechoslovakia were patent. In September of the same year came the Munich agreement at Czechoslovakia's expense. Meanwhile, early in 1938, the British Government reached an agreement with Italy—which had by that time conquered and annexed Abyssinia—over outstanding differences, an action which Spender publicly approved, in spite of the contention that the agreement (involving as it did the recognition of the King of Italy as Emperor of Abyssinia) could be read as a condonation of Italian aggression. On Munich itself he took a line which identified him more closely with the mass of the Conservative Party than with most of his Liberal friends. It was the logical outcome of his constant and reasonable insistence that a nation which has not equipped

itself to support justice with force has no alternative but to abandon justice when a challenge comes. Subsequent reflection did not lead him to modify that view. In a letter from which I have already quoted, written to myself in January 1940, he said: "My membership of the Royal Commission on Armaments gave me opportunity (after it had finished its work) of discovering the position of British and French compared with German armaments, especially in the air, and even at sea, until certain deficiencies were made good, and I became absolutely convinced that *cunctando* was imperative until at least the spring of last year [1939]. It was therefore a necessity from my point of view to put the best face on Chamberlain's Fabian policy even at the cost of seeming lukewarm about Czechoslovakia." In fact Spender went further than "putting the best face on Chamberlain's Fabian policy". In what Geoffrey Dawson, the Editor of *The Times*, called "a noble letter" to that paper, he actively defended the Prime Minister against the leader of the Liberal Party, thereby alienating—as he had painfully reconciled himself to doing—many of his closest Liberal friends, who thenceforward numbered him among the "appeasers". The date of the letter was July 8th 1939, and *The Times* gave it the chief place on its leader page. Its brevity did not diminish its force. It ran:

SIR,

Will you allow me, as a member of the Liberal Party, to enter my protest against the attack on the Prime Minister by Sir Archibald Sinclair, the leader of the party in the House of Commons, in his speech at Wadebridge last Thursday. All parties have declared their agreement on the next steps in foreign policy and their desire to co-operate in any measures that may be necessary to convince the world that we are unanimous and that our Government is in earnest. Sir Archibald's contribution to this end is apparently to assail the Prime Minister in unmeasured terms and hold him up to odium as an incompetent man of infirm purpose. I speak only for myself, but I believe that a great many Liberals share my misgivings about the recent tendency of Liberal policy under the leadership in the House of Commons. They dissent from the version of fact on which the greater part of it is based, and are strongly of opinion that these recriminations should be suspended during these critical times.

Yours etc.,

J. A. SPENDER.

The letter provoked a lively and controversial correspondence, which ran for some ten days in the columns of *The Times*. Spender received considerable support, but among those who dissented from his views were such varied personalities as Lord Cecil, Lady Violet Bonham-Carter and A. G. Gardiner. In a further letter he replied to the charge that he had singled out for criticism one sentence in a long speech by Sir Archibald Sinclair by observing that "it is just these 'one sentences' that go round the world". He might have added, as evidence of that, that a newspaper cutting which he had before him when he wrote his original letter bore the heading "Sinclair Attacks Premier".

Less than two months later Britain was once more at war with Germany. Political hatchets were buried, and again, as in 1914, it was the soldiers rather than the politicians who took charge of foreign affairs.

Chapter XII

AUTHORSHIP

Journalist though Spender was for most of his life, he turned in his later years to more enduring work, and thanks to a remarkable diligence in production set to his credit a number of notable volumes, destined, like the Lives of Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith, to remain permanently the accepted authorities on the subjects with which they deal, as well as some others devoted avowedly rather to the passing occasion. Actually his first published work appeared in 1892, just before he began his association with the *Westminster*, and his last two years after his death, but during his twenty-nine years on the evening *Westminster* he wrote no books at all. An editor with a paper to produce six times a week has little leisure for anything but the daily round.

The first of the score of books which bear Spender's name, *The State and Pensions in Old Age*, has already been mentioned. Produced while the writer was living at Toynbee Hall, it was one of the best examples of the kind of serious social investigation residents at Toynbee Hall have been steadily undertaking in the last fifty years, from Barnett's time to Mallon's. The question of pensions had so far been little explored, and Spender showed great industry

in the collection and presentation of facts and figures, performing incidentally a very useful service in compiling details of the pension schemes already in operation in various European countries. It is interesting, in view of the Old Age Pension Act carried by the Liberal Government sixteen years later (embodying a non-contributory scheme providing pensions of 5/- a week at seventy), to note that Spender's conclusion was that "the only method of dealing with the whole problem of poverty in old age, and superseding outdoor relief, is to adopt the plan of paying a uniform pension to all persons on attaining the age of 65, without any previous contributions".

In 1893 Spender began work on the *Westminster*, and it was thirty years before he wrote another book. It is true that in the interval he published two or three, but they were not written as books, consisting as they did of articles reprinted from the *Westminster*. There was *The Comments of Bagshot, A Modern Journal* by Greville Minor, and a small volume called *The New Fiction*, with a sub-title "A Protest Against Sex-Mania", embodying a lively attack on contemporary schools of literary and art criticism. Some Indian articles in 1912 were reprinted as *The Indian Scene*. Of these works the least ephemeral is *Bagshot*, which consists of weekly articles from the *Westminster*, collected in two volumes in 1907 and 1911 respectively, and subsequently included in Dent's well-known Wayfarers' Library. The lightly-sketched Bagshot who gave his name to the book was an assiduous manufacturer of what some people would style aphorisms and apothegms, but Spender (who preferred simplicity) called notes and maxims, and they appear here as transcribed from his commonplace-book—which it may be assumed was in fact Spender's own. Forming as they do a series of disconnected comments (though in some chapters there is a thread of association) on every kind of subject, they are better suited to their original guise—a newspaper article once a week—than to collection in volume form, for the number of aphorisms the human mind can absorb without discomfort at a sitting is limited. The second instalment of Bagshot, in which the extracts purport to be mainly from letters, possesses more continuity, and is the better for it. Though the work is in no sense autobiographical there are occasional touches that recall Spender's own experiences, Bagshot, for example mentioning somewhere that he had lived through a typhus epidemic as Spender had done at Hull in his *Eastern Morning News* days John Buchan, it should be mentioned, wrote congratulating Spender warmly on *Bagshot*—in its periodical, not its volume, form.

Spender's post-*Westminster* books, ranging from the *Life of Campbell-Bannerman* in 1923 to two posthumous volumes, *Between Two Wars* (1943) and *Last Essays* (1944), covered a wide field, but one marked by a substantial unity and delimited by the scope of the writer's extensive knowledge and broad interests. The books cannot with advantage be either reviewed or summarised here. The best commentaries on them—at any rate the commentaries best calculated to carry conviction—are not the newspaper reviews, but the letters Spender received from readers whose names are their own testimonial. It is due to his reputation to quote some of such judgements here. Of the seventeen books produced between 1923 and Spender's death in 1942 only a rough classification is possible. He wrote two major biographies, the *Life of Campbell-Bannerman*, published in 1923, and the *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith* (in collaboration with Sir Cyril Asquith) in 1932; and two lesser lives, of the first Lord Cowdray and of Sir Robert Hudson, Secretary of the National Liberal Federation, both published in the same year, 1930. *The Public Life*, in two volumes, a series of essays rich in wisdom on problems and people, appeared in 1925, and the two volumes of *Life, Journalism and Politics*, which without purporting to be an autobiography is one, in 1927. Meanwhile a visit to India resulted in *The Changing East* (1926), and a visit to the United States two years later yielded *The America of To-day*. In many ways Spender's most considerable publications, certainly the two representing his most original work, were *Fifty Years of Europe* (1933) and *The Government of Mankind* (1938). Two volumes more similar in their names than in their contents, *These Times* and *A Short History of Our Times*, both appeared in 1934, and *Great Britain, Empire and Commonwealth 1886-1935* in 1936. *Men and Things* (1937) and *New Lamps and Ancient Lights* (1940) were both collections of essays, as were the two posthumous volumes already mentioned. This is a prolific output, but except that there was possibly an excessive republication of purely fugitive essays there is no volume in the list that did not amply justify itself.

The Life of Campbell-Bannerman was Spender's first important book. He was invited to undertake it by Lord Pentland, C.B.'s literary executor, and Morley characteristically protested against the arrangement on the ground that Spender would be unlikely to deal sympathetically with C.B.'s attitude over the Boer War. Actually no better choice of author could have been made. Spender did not know Campbell-Bannerman as he knew Grey or Haldane or Asquith, or for nearly as long, but he knew him well enough

to give the book the necessary personal touch, and he was familiar, as a Liberal journalist, with every detail of the political scene in which the later phases of C.B.'s public life were set. The result is an admirably competent biography, making no attempt at a Guedalline brilliance which would neither have come naturally to the writer nor fitted the subject, but telling a straightforward story in dignified and lucid language, and interpreting accurately and sympathetically a statesman not sufficiently understood by the common man to make interpretation superfluous.

The Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith—in two volumes like *C.B.*—is a greater book. It was written in collaboration with Lord Oxford's fourth son Mr. (now Sir) Cyril Asquith, who is responsible for the chapters, fourteen in all, dealing with Asquith's personal life as distinguished from his public career. Asquith had said some time before his death that he should do his best to make it impossible for anyone to write his life, and he accordingly destroyed nearly all the letters and papers that a biographer would find most indispensable. He did however subsequently so far retract as to observe that if the thing had to be done at all he would rather Spender did it than anyone else. In the event, forty-three chapters of the biography bear Spender's initials, fourteen his collaborator's, while two are initialled by both authors. These latter evidently represent a process of fusion more complete than the general practice, whereby each author wrote his own part and then submitted it for criticism and suggestion to the other. Altogether it is a singularly successful example of literary partnership, and it would be no less difficult than invidious to attempt to decide between the merits of the respective contributions. Each author did his work admirably, and the result is a completely consistent whole, unscarred by seam or join. So far as Spender was concerned he was an ideal biographer. Younger by ten years than Asquith, he was just starting his journalistic career when Asquith, in 1886, entered public life as Member for East Fife; and from 1894, when their personal acquaintance began, he was increasingly in the future Prime Minister's confidence. To knowledge of his mind and motives was added a profound respect and admiration, but the sympathy without which no interpretation can be successful was tempered by that judicial objectivity which marked all Spender's writings on men and things. There were several reasons why the Asquith Life—to speak only of Spender's part in it—was a better book than the C.B. Life. Asquith was an altogether greater figure than C.B. and played a far larger part in the country's history; Spender had known the one personally for

thirty years, the other much less intimately for eight, and in the period covered by Asquith's public career he had himself been concerned intimately in many of the events he was narrating. The two books together gave Spender a notable position as a political biographer, and he might if he had chosen been the author of a third work of a similar nature and scale, for at the end of 1923 Earl Spencer, impressed by the excellence of the C.B. biography, wrote asking whether Spender would undertake the Life of his uncle, "The Red Earl", who had been a member of each of Gladstone's four administrations and held the Liberal leadership in the House of Lords from 1902 to 1905. Spender could not accept the commission, but he was interested and gratified to hear by accident a little later that the suggestion had emanated originally from Lord Rosebery.

The two biographies of 1930, the one of Lord Cowdray, the other of Sir Robert Hudson, were very different from one another, and both of them different, particularly in scale, from the Lives of the two Prime Ministers. Cowdray, long familiar as Sir Weetman Pearson, head of the great engineering firm of S. Pearson and Co., bore little resemblance to the sensitive, scholarly Robert Hudson, known, so far as office confers notoriety, as secretary for nearly thirty years of the National Liberal Federation, but both of them had one material characteristic in common, friendship with Spender. Lord Cowdray was an active and prominent Liberal. As such he became one of the group which took over the *Westminster* from Sir George Newnes in 1908, and he gradually increased his financial interest in the paper till he became its principal proprietor. That was the basis of Spender's association with him, and it meant a great deal, for the association was consistently harmonious, and Spender knew that if he ever needed Cowdray's support at a particular juncture it would never fail him. In such circumstances it was natural that after Cowdray's death in 1927 the family should ask Spender to write a biography (Cowdray himself had contemplated it), and equally inevitable that Spender should agree. The result is a competent (to apply the word so often to Spender's work is tiresome but unavoidable) and instructive volume on a business man—a capitalist, for those who prefer that term in either an appreciative or an opprobrious sense—who by his enterprise provoked admiration, and by his integrity inspired respect, through a good deal more than half the world. It is a sound rather than a distinguished book. Spender no doubt was interested academically, as any man of alert mind must be, in such

vast works of construction as the Blackwall or the Hudson Tunnel, the Vera Cruz Harbour or the Sennar Dam, but they were not achievements that stirred anything very vital in his being, or drew his personality into his pen. He could record the facts and tell the story capably, and did, therein reflecting appropriately the capability which was his subject's chief characteristic.

The biography of Sir Robert Hudson was a different matter. Spender and Hudson were friends for over thirty years. Both of them were steeped in Liberalism and the chief preoccupation of each was to promote the Liberal faith. They had numberless political friends in common, and, apart from politics altogether, common literary tastes provided a close bond between them. And their similarities were sufficiently seasoned by their differences to furnish the best of all bases for friendship. In writing of Hudson, therefore, Spender was handling a subject to which he brought a rare degree of sympathetic understanding. He attempted to cover no large canvas. Hudson was a man known to a limited circle rather than to the world in general, and a lengthy biography in such a case would have lost in quality what it gained in bulk. Spender wrote a book of less than 60,000 words—the Cowdray biography was over 120,000—but the proportion throughout is admirable, the touch delicate but firm and always revealing, and the whole book very near what an ideal short biography should be. In one perhaps unexpected quarter the volume met with high appreciation. In later years Mr. Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister of Canada (who first met Spender during the Imperial Conference of 1923) showed himself a warm admirer of Spender's books. The Hudson Life, I think, was the first which inspired him to express gratitude to the author, and he valued it the more for the ideas regarding organisation which it suggested to the leader of the largest political party in Canada. Mentioning that "your *Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* and your *The Public Life* are volumes for which I cannot thank you too sincerely", Mr. King went on to say of the Hudson volume: "In my twelve years of leadership of the Liberal Party in Canada I have read nothing quite so helpful to one faced with problems of party organisation and finance, and nothing more inspiring as a biography of a truly noble and lovable character."

That was written at the end of 1931, a year or more after the Hudson memoir appeared. The *Life of Lord Oxford* had not then been published, but in a later letter, of November 1933, Mr. Mackenzie King, acknowledging a copy of *Fifty Years of Europe* ("What

a gift to have made your country, I should say our Empire, and I might add all mankind") added: "Ever since I wrote of my appreciation of your *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith* I have felt that I failed altogether to give you any idea of what those two volumes have meant and will continue to mean to me. I re-read most of their pages in the quiet of the summer days at my home in the country, and more than ever I feel grateful to you for the guidance they afford."

Another equally decisive judgement from the same source on a different type of book from Spender's pen may be cited here. In 1934 he wrote *These Times*, a short study of the political scene at home and abroad. The date of publication is material. The book was finished in March 1934. At that time Hitler had just entered on his second year of power: he was inspiring anxiety, but not yet alarm. Franklin Roosevelt also was in his second year of power. Russia was co-operating in various activities at Geneva, and was about to become a full member of the League. The League itself had been shaken by Japanese aggression in Manchuria, but Italian aggression in Ethiopia was still in the future. The Disarmament Conference, though so far unproductive, was still in being. *These Times* was first and foremost an appeal for clarity of thought, and an endeavour to point the way to it in the midst of such perplexities. It dealt with the world as Spender saw it at the moment, with little invocation of history and little attempt at prediction. "It would be a pity," he wrote in his first sentence, "if we merely muddled into a revolution, for revolutions are things which are least suited to the British method of muddling through. But we may do so if we are not clearer about the nature of our institutions than many writers and speakers appear to be." With that thesis as starting-point he developed the case for democracy, the supremacy of Parliament, Liberalism and international co-operation, and in his last chapter but one he outlined a practical and at the same time idealistic programme under the title "A Not Impossible World". It may well have been this chapter which appealed particularly to Mr. Mackenzie King, who told me, a few years after the book's publication, that it had played a large part in winning the general election of 1935 for the Liberal Party in Canada. Elaborating that statement a little for the purposes of this volume he writes:

> "When *These Times* was published in 1934 I recognised at once how helpful this book would be to the members of the Liberal Party in Canada in their understanding of the world

situation as it was emerging out of the situation in Germany. I felt that the lead which Spender had given in *These Times* was one which could not be too widely impressed on the people of Canada in common with the people of Britain, for whose guidance *These Times* was more immediately written. At different meetings of members of my own party I urged upon them the importance of studying carefully what Spender had written. I also secured and distributed numbers of the book and arranged to have parts of it reprinted for distribution to speakers in the political campaign of 1935. The party was returned with a very large majority. I shall always believe that the influence of Spender's writings, in what they afforded of guidance to myself and my colleagues at that particular time, was an important contributing factor to the success of the campaign."

It must have been no small satisfaction to Spender—for the Prime Minister of Canada did not fail to express his appreciation at the time—to know that at a time when his efforts for organised Liberalism in England seemed so fruitless his writings had played such a part in the triumph of Liberalism in the principal Dominion.

But *These Times* belonged to the thirties. The output of the twenties had included, in addition to the two greater biographies, two other major works, *The Public Life* (1925) and *Life, Journalism and Politics* (1927), each published in two volumes, though the length of neither necessitated this inconvenient and expensive form. *The Public Life* was the first, and much the most important, of the five volumes of essays published in Spender's lifetime or soon after his death, and it possessed a unity which none of the others presented or aimed at. The public life was the life of politicians, that life which Spender knew so intimately, but he broadened it to include something he knew still better, the position of the Press in public life, and took occasion to expound lucidly and forcibly his convictions regarding democratic government.

This, his second important work (it appeared two years after the *Life of Campbell-Bannerman*) made an immediate appeal to a wide variety of readers, each of whom usually had his own preference for some particular part of the book. Robert Hichens, for example, wrote:

"Of course I expected to find a great deal to interest me in your book, but I was hardly prepared for its fascination. I

understand the public life now as I never understood it before. Compromises which I condemned I can now forgive. You have made the awful difficulties clear. I was especially interested in your account of what the Foreign Minister has to contend with. What an awful position! And yet men strive for it. Often I think that it's a pity you never went into Parliament. And I very often regret the evening *Westminster's* death. Your book seems to me marvellously fair and free from bias. It is more than a success, and I'm sure in your heart you are thoroughly satisfied with it."

Lord Crewe, then Ambassador in Paris, discussed with much learning and authority what Spender had written about the Party System, and in particular his assumption that the three-party system in English politics had come to stay; at the same time he bore testimony to the soundness of Spender's judgments on French political life. Dr. Campbell Morgan, the well-known Free Church preacher, who was then living in America, wrote: "I think your chapter of twelve and a half pages on Woodrow Wilson is the finest thing I have read on him," adding equal praise for the chapters on Politics and Religion and on International Morality.

The Public Life abundantly merited the approval it commanded, embodying as it does Spender's wide knowledge, acuteness and sanity of judgment, and a political philosophy at once liberal, idealistic and remorselessly practical. In its two-volume form it could only make a limited appeal; the issue of a popular edition when the return of normal conditions makes such things practicable would be a public service, for the book has lost nothing in point of relevance in the twenty years that have passed since its first appearance.

Life, Journalism and Politics came two years later, in 1927. That it should have points of similarity with *The Public Life* is not surprising, for in the first book Spender was commenting on life and politics as seen mainly in other people's careers, in the second as he lived the one and participated in the other. For *Life, Journalism and Politics* is in effect an autobiography. Its subject is Spender's life, his journalistic career, his association with and influence on the politics of his day. It is by the nature of things the most intrinsically interesting of all his works, for few men of his generation could tell of a wider range of contacts with personalities of interest or importance. The whole of Spender's public life is there; of his private life, apart from the story of home and Oxford and early

free-lance days in London, he published next to nothing; light on that can be found only in such letters to Mrs. Spender or to personal friends as have been preserved. *Life, Journalism and Politics* suffers from one characteristic defect, if defect it may be termed. Spender was the soul of discretion, and in addition he could be counted on to minimize his own part in any enterprise he had helped to carry through. Events that he was in a position to describe in much fuller detail—as the survival of documents which were clearly before him when he wrote plainly demonstrates—he handled with a restraint which did singular credit to a man so fully endowed with a journalist's knowledge of what would appeal to his readers. Some incidents I have felt justified in relating more fully than Spender himself did, for the lapse of time and the death of the main actors in the drama automatically removes many embargoes—though needless to say not so far as to palliate indiscriminate disclosures. Some communications must remain confidential not for the moment but for all time.

An example of the second form of restraint Spender observed is the brevity of his references to the part he played behind the scenes in the formation of the Liberal Cabinet of 1905. There are many cases in which Spender himself could, and no doubt would, have said more in 1945 than he felt free to do in 1927, and in which a third party writing of Spender could at either date have said more than Spender himself.

Life, Journalism and Politics is another book that is too little known. Spender's autobiography is in no way inferior in interest or importance, or in literary quality, to many (to take an example at random, Anthony Trollope's) which, thanks to popular reprints, still have their vogue after fifty years and more. Among the appreciations it received was a preliminary, or *ad interim*, one from Lord Rosebery, who wrote in September 1927, two years before his death:

> "I have just lit upon your book, and find the print almost good enough for my blind eyes. I am therefore in the Juvenalia, which I am enjoying, very much against my expectation, because as a rule these nursery chapters are intolerable. I shall persevere, though the print is not quite what I could wish. I am enjoying the account of your school life: I can only say you were a much better boy than I was. I am particularly interested in your account of your correspondence with Newman."

Whether the promised perseverance resulted in another and final

assessment does not appear; there is no trace of any later letter from Rosebery to Spender.

Two other volumes, similar to one another and different from all the rest, formed part of the harvest of the twenties. Both were books of travel. *The Changing East* (1926) was the record of a six-months' journey in Turkey, Egypt and India, *The America of To-day* (1928) the fruit of a shorter tour in the United States, whither Spender went in the autumn of 1927 as the first holder of the Walter Hines Page Fellowship, founded by the English-Speaking Union. Quite apart from the interest and value of such a commission, the friendship Spender had enjoyed with Page made his selection as the first Memorial Fellow a particular pleasure. Both these volumes, especially *The Changing East*, are books of the moment. Spender described the situation he saw as he saw it when he saw it, and it was not in many essentials the situation which exists to-day. *The Changing East*, for example, depicts the Turkey of Mustapha Kemal, and Spender remarks of it: "Government and Parliament are first and last Kemal, and no one knows what would happen to the new republic if he were to pass from the scene." It describes Egypt before the treaty of 1936 had put an end to the long antagonism between Britain and Egyptian. It describes India under dyarchy, before the Act of 1935 had raised new hopes, and subsequent events had dashed them. To that extent it is a book of the past. Yet there is much of it that is of enduring value, particularly in the section on India, for there are aspects of India that will never change, and Indian problems that still await solution in 1945 as in 1926. And both the eastern and the American book are a delight to read. In both Spender has imparted a lighter touch to his style than is common in his political works, the subjects gave scope for good descriptive writing, and in regard to both countries discerning judgements abound.

Of the two *The America of To-day* has more elements of permanence in it. It is true that the America of Calvin Coolidge's second term is profoundly different in many vital respects from the America of Franklin Roosevelt's fourth. But when all is said, nearly everything that is fundamentally American endures. The Middle West is still the Middle West, the deep South still the deep South, the Pacific coast possesses still its own exotic charm. Spender saw them all, and a great deal else, and both his descriptions of the regions he visited and his chapters on various aspects of American life are marked by a natural facility which makes this, in point of style, the most attractive of all his books. As indication of a land-

free-lance days in London, he published next to nothing; light on that can be found only in such letters to Mrs. Spender or to personal friends as have been preserved. *Life, Journalism and Politics* suffers from one characteristic defect, if defect it may be termed. Spender was the soul of discretion, and in addition he could be counted on to minimize his own part in any enterprise he had helped to carry through. Events that he was in a position to describe in much fuller detail—as the survival of documents which were clearly before him when he wrote plainly demonstrates—he handled with a restraint which did singular credit to a man so fully endowed with a journalist's knowledge of what would appeal to his readers. Some incidents I have felt justified in relating more fully than Spender himself did, for the lapse of time and the death of the main actors in the drama automatically removes many embargoes—though needless to say not so far as to palliate indiscriminate disclosures. Some communications must remain confidential not for the moment but for all time.

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assessment does not appear; there is no trace of any later letter from Rosebery to Spender.

Two other volumes, similar to one another and different from all the rest, formed part of the harvest of the twenties. Both were books of travel. *The Changing East* (1926) was the record of a six-months' journey in Turkey, Egypt and India, *The America of To-day* (1928) the fruit of a shorter tour in the United States, whither Spender went in the autumn of 1927 as the first holder of the Walter Hines Page Fellowship, founded by the English-Speaking Union. Quite apart from the interest and value of such a commission, the friendship Spender had enjoyed with Page made his selection as the first Memorial Fellow a particular pleasure. Both these volumes, especially *The Changing East*, are books of the moment. Spender described the situation he saw as he saw it when he saw it, and it was not in many essentials the situation which exists to-day. *The Changing East*, for example, depicts the Turkey of Mustapha Kemal, and Spender remarks of it: "Government and Parliament are first and last Kemal, and no one knows what would happen to the new republic if he were to pass from the scene." It describes Egypt before the treaty of 1936 had put an end to the long antagonism between Britain and Egyptian. It describes India under dyarchy, before the Act of 1935 had raised new hopes, and subsequent events had dashed them. To that extent it is a book of the past. Yet there is much of it that is of enduring value, particularly in the section on India, for there are aspects of India that will never change, and Indian problems that still await solution in 1945 as in 1926. And both the eastern and the American book are a delight to read. In both Spender has imparted a lighter touch to his style than is common in his political works, the subjects gave scope for good descriptive writing, and in regard to both countries discerning judgements abound.

Of the two *The America of To-day* has more elements of permanence in it. It is true that the America of Calvin Coolidge's second term is profoundly different in many vital respects from the America of Franklin Roosevelt's fourth. But when all is said, nearly everything that is fundamentally American endures. The Middle West is still the Middle West, the deep South still the deep South, the Pacific coast possesses still its own exotic charm. Spender saw them all, and a great deal else, and both his descriptions of the regions he visited and his chapters on various aspects of American life are marked by a natural facility which makes this, in point of style, the most attractive of all his books. As indication of a land-

mark in America's career—the prosperity of 1927-28 was the prelude to the slump of 1929—it has a distinct retrospective value, but it must be taken primarily as what it professes to be, a picture of the United States of eighteen years ago.

To the nineteen-thirties belong the two most important books Spender wrote, books on the strength of which alone any university in the United Kingdom might well have seen fit to offer him an honorary degree—which no university in the United Kingdom ever did. *Fifty Years of Europe* was published in 1933, *The Government of Mankind* in 1938. The former is a work that embodies immense research, and not three men in England could have covered the ground so comprehensively and authoritatively. Spender was impressed by the general lack of detailed knowledge of public events possessed by the generation, or two generations, that preceded the First German War, and he set himself with characteristic industry and thoroughness to supply the deficiency. His own experience did not cover the whole period from 1871 to 1914, but it covered a great part of it, and he supplemented that by an exhaustive exploration of the documents published by the various Governments in the decade that followed the war—Gooch and Temperley's British Documents, the German *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette*, and on top of these the Austrian official documents, which frequently threw new light on various incidents and required existing judgements to be revised. Of the qualifications he possessed and the methods he followed Spender wrote in his preface: "For two-thirds of this period (1871 to 1914) it was my daily duty as a journalist to express opinions on the transactions dealt with in these records; and I have found a special interest in retracing this ground and endeavouring to see these transactions so to speak on their obverse side, that is as they appeared to other nations and Governments." Such experience, it may be claimed, enabled Spender to see the situation steadily and see it whole. The result is a volume of remarkable range and balance, which, in spite of the details into which it necessarily enters—occasionally, it must be confessed, the earnest reader, when working his tortuous way through some Balkan complication, may wish the journey had been a little shortened—is essentially readable from first to last. Much of the ground Spender had already covered when helping Lord Grey with the preparation of his *Twenty-five Years*, but the treatment here is more scientific, searching and considered. It will be long before any future writer on this period can regard *Fifty Years of Europe* as an authority that may be dispensed with.

Of the many expressions of gratitude for this book none represented the general view more accurately than a letter from Sir Cyril (Mr. Justice) Asquith.

"The way," wrote Spender's fellow-author of the *Life of Lord Oxford*, "in which you weave the bewildering strands of pre-war diplomacy and international policy into a coherent picture, without sacrificing either interest or accuracy, seems to me really masterly. This is exactly the book for which multitudes of people like myself have been searching in vain. They are faced with the alternative of reading mere propaganda on the one hand, or on the other of embarking on research among the documents, for which they have no time or no stomach. Your book relieves them of the dilemma, without falling between the stools, as it might so easily have done in other hands."

Lord Hankey, who from the official positions he had held as secretary both of the Committee of Imperial Defence and of the Cabinet possessed an almost unique knowledge of current events in the fields both of home and of foreign affairs, wrote of the book:

"It is an absolute masterpiece. I have told several members of the Cabinet that every Cabinet Minister ought to read it. Like me they cannot pretend to keep *au fait* with all the literature on these matters, so that your book fills a gap in our knowledge. Apart from the value of the book as history I find your appreciations very fair, and full of common sense."

One interesting commentary of a different kind came rather later. In March 1937 the late Lord Chancellor (who was then Home Secretary) wrote to Spender:

My Dear Spender,

I think you may be interested to know that, as I was asked to examine for the Birchall Citizenship Prize at Eton this year, I chose your *Fifty Years of Europe* and set the enclosed examination paper. I won't ask you to answer the questions, but I hope you will feel they are the sort of questions that the new generation ought to be asked when they have read your volume.

Yours ever,

John Simon.

Spender was in due course shown the winning papers,* took great interest in them, wrote a general and very appreciative comment on them as a whole, and gave to each of the winners an inscribed copy of his later book *Great Britain, Empire and Commonwealth.*

The second of Spender's greater books of the thirties had an interesting origin. He was talking with Lord Balfour a short time before the latter's death, and was asked in what respect after forty years' observation of public affairs his outlook had changed. He replied, after a moment's reflection, that whereas he had once thought of government as a comparatively simple thing he now saw it as the most difficult and complicated of all the human arts. Lord Balfour said that was precisely the conclusion he himself had reached, and, says Spender, "something that he said in the talk that followed put into my head the idea of reading again what had been said about this art by sages and philosophers in past time, and seeing how it looked in the light of modern experience." From that resolve *The Government of Mankind* resulted. In it is displayed an erudition different in kind from that manifested in *Fifty Years of Europe*, but no less striking. To describe its contents is sufficient indication of its range and scope. It covers the whole vast span of human history, from the Piltdown man to Mussolini, as the father (rather than Hitler) of totalitarianism in its modern form. Between those limits the philosophy of government is studied stage by stage in the civilisations of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, of Greece and Rome, in the writings of Thucydides, of Plato and Aristotle, of Cicero and St. Augustine, of Dante and Machiavelli, in thirteenth century England, in the works of Hobbes and Locke,

*The examination paper is worth appending as a matter of interest.

THE BIRCHALL CITIZENSHIP PRIZE 1936

(Do not answer less than four nor more than five questions)

1. Estimate the importance of the personal diplomacy of Edward VII in European politics during his reign.
2. Trace the steps by which we were led to abandon the policy of splendid isolation.
3. In the development of events before the war, how much importance do you attach to the personal part played by (a) the German Emperor; (b) the Russian Czar; (c) the Emperor of Austria?
4. Was the British Government justified in not making an earlier announcement that Britain would go to war with Germany if Germany invaded Belgium?
5. What is your view as to the alleged "war guilt" of Germany?
6. Should Britain's entry into the Great War be classed as (a) due to high principle; (b) due to self-interest?
7. "No war is inevitable." "The Great War was inevitable." Which view do you prefer, and why?

Rousseau and Burke, of the Federalists of America, of Hegel and Marx, down to the days of Bolshevism and Fascism and Nazism. The conclusions reached in the last chapter are characteristic in their optimism:

"All who write about the State," Spender affirms, "or reflect upon the art of government, are under the same necessity. To make sense of their story they must discover some thread of purpose running through it. However stained with crime and folly it may be, it is the story of the ascent of man from savage beginnings to an imperfect civilisation. Through all backslidings we see man clinging to the belief that right and wrong, truth and falsehood, are realities which correspond to the divine nature of things. . . . It is impossible to believe that any Government or system of government which, on the plea of public necessity, sets itself against the great human judgments of what is right and wrong between men and men will be of long duration."

Since Spender wrote, that truth has had its demonstration in Berlin. Here is one more book which deserves to rank as a modern classic. It appeared at a moment of political stress, when minds were attuned to the study of the immediate crises of government rather than the philosophy of government. But its day may yet come, for it deals with a problem of the utmost human import, on which few if any other books of just this type are available. No university history course but would be the better for its inclusion.

Briefer mention must suffice for the rest of the output of these later years. It testifies to an astonishing industry on the part of a man who was still maintaining a steady and substantial flow of newspaper articles week by week. *Great Britain, Empire and Commonwealth, 1886-1935*, for example, published in 1936, is a volume of some 350,000 words,* written because Spender felt it needed to be written, as it unquestionably did. It found appreciation in at least one unexpected quarter. Some eighteen months after its publication Spender received a communication to which subsequent events lend added interest, a letter written with a fine brush on soft rice paper in faultless English. It ran:

Himeji High School,
Himeji, March 4, 1938.

DEAR SIR,

I am writing to ask you whether you will grant me permission

*For purposes of comparison, the length of the present volume is about 100,000 words.

to translate into Japanese your work *Great Britain 1886–1935*, so that my countrymen may increase their knowledge of the recent history of your country for which your work seems to me peculiarly suited.

I wish to undertake and dedicate this translation to the memory of my only son who died last year, and it is therefore for his sake as well as my own that I am asking you to grant me this favour.

With apologies for intruding on your valuable time,

I am,

Yours faithfully,

J. NAKAMURA.

J. A. Spender, Esq.

The translation of words is relatively simple. The translation into Japanese of the British philosophy of empire may have proved more difficult.

For the rest, Spender published in 1934 *A Short History of Our Own Times* (like another well-known journalist, Justin McCarthy, before him) which needs no more description than its name conveys; and in 1937 a volume, partly of reprints, entitled *Men and Things*, from which Dr. G. M. Trevelyan singled out for special praise a chapter devoted to Lord Haldane. "The puzzle of Haldane's personality," he wrote, "has never been so well analysed. You do it with the authority of knowledge. Even so, though I am sure that you are right that his 'mysterious' manner did most of the mischief—even so it remains strange." In a postscript the Master of Trinity adds: "I liked specially 'Grey at his best seemed to be the voice of things speaking for themselves'."

The last book to be published in Spender's lifetime, *New Lamps and Ancient Lights*, was, as its happily-conceived title indicates, another volume of essays old and new. *Between Two Wars*, finished a few weeks before his death, appeared posthumously. Here again the title tells its own story. It was along the lines of *These Times*, an attempt, which events made much more desperate, to show how the world got where it did get by September 1939. It suffers from various slips which Spender would certainly have corrected if he had had time to revise his work, but it is marked constantly by a discernment which the collective wisdom of the world has since endorsed, as, for example, when it contends that "the guardianship of the peace must be in the hands of a few industrially-equipped Great Powers pledged to work together on an agreed plan." Spender

never concealed his conviction that the course Mr. Chamberlain took in 1938 was the only one possible at the moment, in view of the state of British and German armaments respectively, and *Between Two Wars* has been described by a high authority as the best existing defence of the Munich policy. Spender would have been well content to hear it so assessed.

Finally, in 1944, as the result of gleanings among odd papers, a modest volume called *Last Essays* was produced. It is perhaps the slightest of the publications to which Spender's name is set, and one or two of the least important chapters in it might have been omitted. But its appearance was fully justified by the public's absorption of copies of it, and—a better criterion—by the intrinsic value of many of the papers it included, particularly two so different as one on "British Foreign Policy in the Reign of George V", and another in which, under the title "Free Verse and Rhythm" Spender expresses himself with refreshing vigour on the vagaries of modern poets.

It was the last addition to the long row on the shelf.

Chapter XIII

COMMISSIONS AND MISSION

Spender was at different times a member of two Royal Commissions, on Divorce and on the Private Manufacture of Arms, and of the Milner Mission to Egypt, which was at least as important as either of the other two. He was peculiarly well qualified for such service, adding to general familiarity with the subject under investigation the journalist's faculty for eliciting and assimilating facts, an unusually balanced and judicial mind and a conscientiousness which ensured that he would throw all his powers into any task he undertook. The fact that he was chosen as member of three different bodies dealing with questions bearing no relation to one another is testimony to the opinion held by two Prime Ministers and a Foreign Secretary of his combination of native ability with wide knowledge of an extensive field of public affairs.

It was on the strength of those qualifications that he was invited in September 1909 by Asquith to serve as member of the Royal Commission about to be appointed "to enquire into the state of the

law and administration in regard to Divorce and Matrimonial Causes". The Commission was an influential body, presided over by Lord Gorell, a former President of the Divorce Court, who, by initiating a debate on the question in the House of Lords, had been directly responsible for the Commission's appointment. Spender spoke in the highest terms of his ability, his humanity and his genuine reforming zeal. Among other members were Lord Guthrie, the Scottish Judge, the Archbishop of York (the present Lord Lang of Lambeth), Sir Frederick Treves, Lady Frances Balfour and Mrs. H. J. Tennant. They worked assiduously, sitting three days a week from twelve to four—just the time which must have been nearest to the impossible for the editor of an important evening paper. It gave Spender great satisfaction to be brought into regular contact with his old Balliol friend Cosmo Lang, but they found themselves much at variance on the subject responsible for the contact. Lang in the end formed one of three signatories of a minority report which advocated only the most narrowly limited revision of the existing law, basing itself on purely ecclesiastical principles which the majority refused to accept as the decisive factor in the determination of secular legislation.

That existing law rested mainly on the important statute of 1857 (bitterly opposed by Mr. Gladstone during its passage through the House of Commons), the essential feature of which was the enactment that while a husband could obtain a divorce on evidence of his wife's adultery, a wife could only get a decree if to her husband's adultery was added either cruelty or desertion for two years. An amending Act in 1859 instituted the "decree nisi" procedure, whereby—to give the King's Proctor an opportunity for investigation in cases where collusion or some other irregularity is suspected—a decree is not made absolute till six months after the date of the original hearing. The intention in appointing the Royal Commission was clearly that that body should point the way to the removal of obstacles, financial and other, to the grant of divorce decrees in cases where humanity and justice dictated such a course. Spender himself was deeply conscious of the inadequacy and injustice of the existing law, which, largely under ecclesiastical influence, left hardships of the most indefensible character, such as the impossibility of securing divorce from an incurably insane wife or husband, unremedied. All his efforts were directed towards making divorce both cheaper and easier, and he found it impossible to comprehend, much less to tolerate, the obscurantist attitude of the great majority of the ecclesiastical witnesses whom

the Commission heard. A wide gulf separated him in particular from his friend Archbishop Lang, who, with Sir Lewis Dibdin, Dean of the Arches, and Sir William Anson, formed a minority of three which reported in favour only of equality of treatment for the sexes (i.e., granting a wife a divorce on evidence of her husband's adultery without demanding that it be accompanied by cruelty or desertion) and of admitting certain grounds for nullity suits—a procedure not frequently resorted to nor of great importance.

The majority, after exacting labours, produced a set of liberal recommendations which, if adopted, would have constituted a signal mark of progress in a field in which the need for progress was clamant. But Spender observed, half philosophically, half sardonically, that none of the various committees and commissions on which he sat succeeded in making any sensible impression on the existing order. That conclusion was unduly pessimistic. Movement was lamentably slow, but in the end things did move. Spender lived to see Mr. A. P. Herbert carry into law in 1937—twenty-six years after the Royal Commission had reported—a Bill embodying several of the Commission's most important proposals. Those proposals, as formulated by the majority, included the hearing of divorce suits locally at assizes; equality between the sexes in the matter of divorce for adultery; and the admission of new grounds for divorce—desertion for three years, cruelty, incurable insanity of five years duration, imprisonment under a commuted death sentence.

One question in which Spender naturally took a special interest was the proposal to limit the reporting of divorce cases in the Press in view of the deliberate practice of a minority of papers of giving prominence to every salacious detail the evidence in divorce hearings could provide. The discussions on this took a curious turn, Spender (who had already threatened to resign his membership of the Commission if a proposal that marriage between a respondent and a co-respondent be prohibited were adopted) being left in the course of them in a minority of one. Twelve out of thirteen commissioners voted for excluding the Press from the divorce courts altogether, a proposition which Spender was bound in the name of the profession he represented to contest vigorously. Once more he had to decide whether to resign from the Commission, but he concluded that it would be better to remain a member and embody his views in a memorandum to be attached to the report. In the end that proved unnecessary. His own pro-

posal was that there should be no published report of a case till the case was concluded, (which would mean that as a rule mere considerations of space would prevent it from being reported in any detail), and that over and above that the Judge in a particular case should be free to impose whatever restrictions he thought fit. A document surviving among his papers records his vexation and perplexity at the flat rejection of his proposal by his colleagues —he was after all the only professional journalist on the Commission—but on the back of it is a faint pencilled note, now barely legible: "the whole thing afterwards reconsidered and my proposal adopted". That was in fact what happened, and it was a considerable triumph for the one Commissioner who had stood out against the remaining twelve.

But neither in this case nor in any other did the adoption of a recommendation by the Commission carry it an inch towards enactment in legislation. The Commission's two reports, Majority and Minority, were issued in 1912. They were noted, discussed at the clubs and the Inns of Court, commented on in the Press. But other preoccupations, notably the Irish question, were engaging Parliament and public, and in 1914 the cataclysm of the war diverted attention indefinitely from such domestic concerns as divorce law reform. It was not till 1922 that adultery alone was made a ground for divorce in man and woman alike. In 1926 the reporting of divorce law proceedings was dealt with in an Act which confined reports to the names and addresses of the parties, the Judge's summing-up and judgment and the verdict of the jury. Spender disliked the Act for not very convincing reasons; it has on the whole worked well, and by prohibiting the reporting of evidence has deprived a certain type of Sunday paper of valuable material for the demoralisation of its readers. It was not till 1937, as has been said, that the Commission of 1910 saw any substantial portion of its aspirations realised. The Matrimonial Causes Bill of that year embodied three reforms for which the Majority Report of the Commission had pressed earnestly—the grant of divorce in cases of incurable insanity, of cruelty and of three years' desertion. It was a late harvest, but the labours of Spender and his colleagues from 1910 to 1912 had done much to prepare the ground for it.

The Milner Mission had not the status of a Royal Commission, but it was none the less important for that. It was technically known as a Special Mission, and consisted of six members, headed by Lord Milner, who was then Colonial Secretary in Lloyd George's

Coalition Government. Lord Curzon, as Acting Foreign Secretary, appointed it in May 1919 "to inquire into the causes of the late disorders in Egypt, and to report on the existing situation in the country and the form of constitution which, under the Protectorate, will be best calculated to promote its peace and prosperity, the progressive development of self-governing institutions and the protection of foreign interests". The members of the Mission, in addition to Milner and Spender, were Sir Rennell Rodd (subsequently Lord Rennell), who, like Milner, had served in Egypt in early life; General Sir John Maxwell; Brigadier General Sir Owen Thomas, a Labour M.P.; and Mr. (now Sir) Cecil Hurst, the chief legal adviser to the Foreign Office. In Sir Rennell Rodd, as in the case of Dr. Cosmo Lang on the Royal Commission on Divorce, Spender welcomed an old Balliol man, a little senior to himself, and the growth of a warm friendship was the result of their co-operation. Both were classics, and a fellow-member of the Mission recalls them sitting on the veranda of the Semiramis Hotel after dinner discussing ardently what Browning miscalls the doctrine of the enclitic δε, or some problem equally abstruse from the Greek dramatists. When Rodd died in 1941 Spender wrote (in a private letter to a friend): "Rennell was one of my best friends—a charming man, not powerful, but really accomplished. He was a delightful companion and it was a pleasure to stay with him, and even to see him."

Spender claimed no special knowledge of Egyptian affairs, apart from what he may have derived from contacts with Lord Cromer since the latter's return to England in 1907, but he had a good general knowledge, a keen appreciation of the dangers of the existing situation and a strong conviction that Egyptian aspirations must be met with all the promptitude compatible with ordered progress. He realised in particular, what most Englishmen consistently forgot, that Egypt was not, and never had been, a British possession. He took his appointment seriously, threw himself with unsparing energy into the work of the Mission and retained a keen interest in Egyptian affairs long after its labours were ended. When he was invited to join the Mission his duties at the *Westminster* seemed to make it impossible for him to contemplate an absence of several months from the country, but his proprietors removed all obstacles to his acceptance, Curzon had chosen him specifically as a representative of Liberal opinion, and Asquith, whom he consulted, said it was imperative he should go. Accordingly, accompanied by Mrs. Spender, he set off for Cairo with

the rest of the members of the Mission, travelling overland to Marseilles and thence by sea.

To understand completely the situation with which the Milner Mission had to deal it would be necessary to summarise the complicated history of Egypt from 1879 or 1882. It must suffice here to recall one or two of the salient events between the date, 1907, when Cromer laid down his historic stewardship, and the arrival of the Mission in Cairo in December 1919. Cromer was followed by Sir Eldon Gorst, who for four years rode the country with a loose rein, with the unforeseen result of stimulating the growth of nationalism of a heady and dangerous type. Gorst was succeeded in 1911 by Kitchener, who guided Egypt's destinies successfully till the outbreak of war in 1914. In that war Turkey soon took her place among Britain's enemies, and the status she had till then enjoyed as suzerain of Egypt was naturally abolished. In December 1914 it was announced by the British Government that

> "In view of the state of war arising out of the action of Turkey Egypt is placed under the protection of His Majesty, and will henceforth constitute a British Protectorate."

So long as the war lasted the change of status made little practical difference in Egypt, where Kitchener was succeeded as High Commissioner by Sir Henry McMahon, and McMahon by Sir Reginald Wingate, the country being administered under martial law; but with the return of peace and the general currency of undefined ideas about self-determination, Egypt's latent nationalism quickly boiled up, and a Nationalist Committee was formed under the chairmanship of Zaghlul Pasha, who had been the recognised Nationalist leader as far back as Gorst's days. The demand was for independence complete and immediate. More responsible Egyptians, Rushdi Pasha and Adly Pasha Yeghen, were detailed to go to England as a delegation, but though the proposal was strongly supported by the High Commissioner, Sir Reginald Wingate, it was not favoured in London, and a second attempt met with no better reception. Feeling in Egypt ran high, and in March 1919 it was considered necessary to arrest Zaghlul and three of his principal supporters and deport them to Malta. This precipitated serious disorders in Egypt, in the course of which two British officers and five other ranks were murdered by an excited crowd. Lord Allenby, the Commander-in-Chief in Egypt

and Palestine, was appointed High Commissioner, and he soon succeeded in restoring law and order. Zaghlul was released, and went off with the idea of making a formal appearance if he could (which he could not) at the Paris Peace Conference; Rushdi Pasha formed a Ministry which lasted a fortnight; and the country continued to be governed in effect by the High Commissioner.

In view of the possibility of fresh disturbances some doubt was felt in London as to whether it was wise for the Milner Mission to go to Egypt after all, but Spender urged that when once the appointment of the Mission had been announced it would be disastrous to withdraw. That view prevailed, and the members of the Mission arrived in Cairo in the first week of December. They could hardly have started their work in more unfavourable conditions. Egypt, now in an aggressively suspicious mood, was convinced that the Mission had come not to give Egypt independence but to see how to govern her more effectively. A rigid boycott of the Mission was proclaimed, and most of the Egyptian moderates who were ready to enter into discussions were intimidated by the extremists who were not. In such circumstances Spender's presence was of special value. He was the only member of the Mission who had never been either a soldier or an official, and he was known as a life-long Liberal and a political opponent of the British Government of the day. Even that in the first instance did not help much, for official anxiety for the safety of the Mission was such that its members could never move anywhere unattended by detectives or a police guard, while sentries were posted forbiddingly at the doors of their hotel. In such conditions there could obviously be little useful contact with Egyptians.

The Mission, moreover, had been fatally hampered by its terms of reference, or would have been if it had let itself be bound by them, for it was required to report on the form of constitution which "under the Protectorate" would be best calculated to promote the country's peace and prosperity. But the question of maintaining the Protectorate—if indeed there could be any question of maintaining it at all—was the head and front of everything. If abolition of the Protectorate were to be ruled out of discussion the Mission might as well have remained in London—or never have been appointed. Fortunately Milner was as ready as Spender to put his own construction on the terms of reference, and the Mission entered on its work unfettered by preconditions or provisos. The work itself was divided into two phases. The first, lasting something under four months, consisted of inquiries and dis-

cussions in Egypt, the second, of some eight months, was devoted to further discussions, and the preparation of the report, in London. The report itself was finally passed and signed almost twelve months to a day from the date when the members of the Mission had first landed at Port Said.

The first phase was a strange, adventurous affair, for it soon became clear that if the Mission wanted evidence it would have to go and seek it; evidence would not be tendered spontaneously, or come on invitation, in face of the prevailing boycott. The boycott, indeed, kept the Mission virtually idle for the first fortnight. British officials could, of course, be interviewed and consulted, but the Mission had not come to Egypt to see the country through British eyes. To begin with, Spender prepared an able survey of the existing situation (which Milner approved without reserve), in which he underlined the difficulties of an administrative system in which efficient British officials had to co-operate with frequently inefficient Egyptian Ministers and somehow avoid wounding the sensitive susceptibilities of the latter. He emphasised the fact that "the Nationalist movement is, without doubt, deep and genuine, and it would be a total mistake to regard it as merely manufactured by 'agitators'. It is the inevitable result of our own efforts to educate the country and bring it in contact with western ideas and civilisation". His conclusion was that in face of all the complexities of the situation "the best that we can hope is that we shall reach a compromise which will remove practical grievances and harmonise the British control of foreign relations and European interests with the practical independence of Egypt in her internal affairs". This sentence half reveals and half conceals the fundamental problem. (There was, of course, no need to define it more explicitly in a document intended solely for Spender's colleagues, who understood it all too well). However strong and genuine the desire to grant Egypt independence might be, a country so situated geographically could not be allowed to fall under the influence of any foreign Power, and British troops must remain there to defend the Suez Canal and other strategic features like airfields. In addition there were the questions of the Capitulations (the right of foreigners to be tried by their own Consular courts, or, in civil cases, by Mixed Courts, together with privileges in the matter of taxation) and the Anglo-Egyptian condominium in the Sudan.

But the first business of the Mission was to gain the confidence of the Egyptians, or, more accurately, to mitigate something of

their distrust and hostility. With that in view Spender proposed that a proclamation be issued defining the purpose of the Mission in language calculated to create reassurance. That course was taken, and it may be surmised that Spender had a good deal to do with the wording of the document, but there was little sign of resultant reassurance. The only hope was to develop personal and informal contacts by any means that offered, a task in which, as has been indicated, Spender possessed certain advantages over his colleagues. The Report of the Milner Mission contains a sentence which reads, colourlessly enough, "the visit to Tanta of one member of the Mission led to serious riots, which continued for many days, and were only quelled by the intervention of the military". The member in question, Spender, gives a much more picturesque description of the incidentals of his visit to this provincial centre—a drive through the town with one police car in front and another behind, threats of mobbing by a crowd of students, devious convoy through back streets and side lanes by an admirable and plucky Egyptian boy as sole but sufficient escort. Spender himself departed safely and without sacrifice of dignity, but the riots provoked by the descent of a member of the Mission on Tanta continued for about a fortnight. One other sentence in the report appears to hint at more of Spender's activities. "The whole Mission," it is stated, "with the exception of one member who was otherwise engaged, passed the inside of a week at Alexandria." Spender says nothing about passing any time at Alexandria, and he says a good deal about what may be described as being otherwise engaged. What he decided to do—there were those who rather questioned the propriety of such a move on the part of a member of an official mission—was to go more or less incognito on a tour in the provinces, with an English business man as guide. He thus made many contacts which to an avowed member of the Mission would have been impossible, gathering in consequence a great deal of useful information. His identity was usually discovered in the end, but not till he had got most or all that he wanted to get. It was an errand obviously attended with some risk, for a party of young Egyptians soon got on the tourist's tracks, and there were enough violent characters about to justify some apprehension.

After that came some full days at Cairo, where certain moderates, like Adly Pasha, Ziwar Pasha and Hassanein Bey, were perfectly ready to talk with the Mission, though they were studious to avoid making any constructive proposals of their own. One of

the most important meetings Spender had was with Ali Maher Pasha, then a prominent member of the Wafd (Zaghlul's Nationalist committee) who was to be Prime Minister on two occasions later. Ali Maher had been ordered by the British military authorities, under martial law, to remain at his country house and abstain from political activity. It was when this order was lifted, and he was on the point of leaving Egypt for Paris to confer with Zaghlul, that Ali Maher consented to see Spender. It was in no sense a secret meeting, for it took place in the lounge of Shepheard's Hotel. The talk was entirely friendly and lasted late into the night. It obviously made a deep impression on Ali Maher and without doubt contributed largely to Zaghlul's decision to abandon the boycott and enter into discussions with Milner (and Spender) in London after the Mission's return to England.

This took place in March, but Spender was not destined to leave Egypt scatheless, though what befell him was the result of an accident, not of nationalist aggression. Having gone out into the Sakkara Desert to explore the Temple of Serapis, he slipped and fell over a parapet flat on his back into the tomb of a sacred bull. He thought at first that his spine was broken—it turned out in the end that two ribs were fractured and some muscles badly torn—and the journey back on a donkey over six miles of desert in a deluge of rain must have been a searching ordeal. In the end he was got to Cairo and then to Alexandria, where, after treatment at the excellent hospital there, he was strapped up and allowed to board ship for home.

Then the second phase of the Mission's labours began. It involved more than the framing of a report, for Zaghlul Pasha, the head of the Wafd, whom the Mission had failed to see in Cairo, came to London with six colleagues. Adly Pasha was in London also, and long discussions with both schools of Egyptians ensued, in the hope of reaching a solution by agreement. The members of the Mission had left Egypt convinced that the only sound basis for relations between Britain and Egypt in the future was a Treaty of Alliance, freely contracted and endorsed by a freely elected Egyptian Parliament, under which Egypt, in return for the full recognition of her independence as a sovereign State, would freely give Britain the required guarantees regarding the defence of the Canal, the protection of foreign interests and other essential points. Discussion with Zaghlul, in which Milner, Rodd and Spender particularly figured, inspired some temporary optimism regarding the immediate prospects, and a document known as

the Milner-Zaghlul Agreement embodied the outlines of a settlement. But Zaghlul raised difficulties, the agreement broke down, and in December the Mission handed its report to the Government.

That, technically, ended the Milner Mission and Spender's official association with Egypt. But his interest in the country, once aroused, never flagged. He deplored the failure of the Government to act on the Report (which was published on 11th February 1921)*, but the Cabinet was heavily occupied with the Irish question, Lord Milner had resigned his post as Colonial Secretary, and Mr. Churchill, who succeeded him, made some speeches which upset Egyptian politicians. Through 1921 Milner and Spender (who had been sent for by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, to talk about the Report, but made no impression on him) exchanged various letters, mainly pessimistic, about the outlook. In 1922 the pace was forced by Allenby, who under threat of resignation compelled the Government to make some move, though in the unsatisfactory form of a unilateral declaration imposing on Egypt, now declared an independent sovereign State, the regime which the Milner Mission had hoped to see established by friendly agreement.

Spender paid short visits to Egypt in 1926, *en route* for India, and in 1930, *en route* for Palestine, seeing enough Egyptians of importance on each occasion to keep him in touch with all trends of political opinion in the country. Not only that, but he followed developments closely from London, so far as information was available, and when, in 1935, the British Government seemed bent on letting slip the opportunity, which Egypt's fear of Italian imperialism had created, for a better understanding he impressed on Mr. Eden (who had just become Foreign Secretary) the possibilities of an intrinsically favourable situation. How far his representations were responsible for the change of Government policy which at once took place can only be surmised. At any rate it did take place, and in 1936 a twenty-years' Treaty of Alliance, freely negotiated, between Britain and Egypt was concluded. Once more a Commission of which Spender was a member had

*Nearly four years later Sir Austen Chamberlain, who was a Cabinet Minister in 1921, meeting Spender accidentally, told him that "Milner, though in the Cabinet, never said a word all through 1920, and then launched the Report on them like a bomb, and it was too much to expect any Cabinet to take it without preparation—especially when Milner himself told them he was never so surprised in his life as when he found his thoughts taking the form they did in the Report". (From a letter from Spender to his wife.)

borne its appointed, but belated, fruit—and the result was the ungrudging support which a united Egypt gave her ally throughout the African campaigns of 1939 to 1942.

The second Royal Commission for which Spender's services were invoked was appointed by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald in 1935 to inquire into the Private Manufacture of and Trade in Arms, or, as it was more briefly termed in current discussion, the traffic in arms. The subject had aroused considerable controversy, and the Government was constantly being reminded, particularly by the League of Nations Union and those daily and weekly journals which shared its views, that Article VIII of the League Covenant made the explicit statement that "the manufacture by private enterprise of munitions and implements of war is open to grave objections", and went on to refer, as a fact equally accepted, to "the evil effects attendant on such manufacture", and the means of obviating them. The Commission was invited by its terms of reference to give full attention to this aspect of the question. Its President was a Lord Justice, Sir John Eldon Bankes, and its members included, in addition to Spender, Dame Rachel Crowdy, Sir Kenneth Lee, Sir Thomas Allen, a leading figure in the co-operative movement, and Professor H. C. Gutteridge, who held the Chair of Comparative Law at Cambridge. None of them, it may be observed, was an active politician.

The Commission had no easy task before it. One clear-cut issue, indeed, was presented, whether the nationalisation of the armaments industry was desirable or not. Spender was satisfied that it was not, and as it turned out the rest of the Commission took the same view. In addition it was necessary first of all to decide what the evils attendant on the private manufacture of armaments were—which meant testing a good many random allegations in the Press and elsewhere—and then deciding what steps should be taken to put wrong right. The most important witnesses heard were representatives of the great armament firms, notably Sir Charles Craven, the Managing Director of Vickers-Armstrong, who were subjected to a searching cross-examination by the Left wing of the Commission, and a more measured but no less direct catechism by Spender. In this matter he could be counted neither with the Right nor with the Left, maintaining the attitude of an investigator free from preconceptions, a role shared with his colleague Professor Gutteridge. But there is no mathematical middle course in such cases, and Spender tended

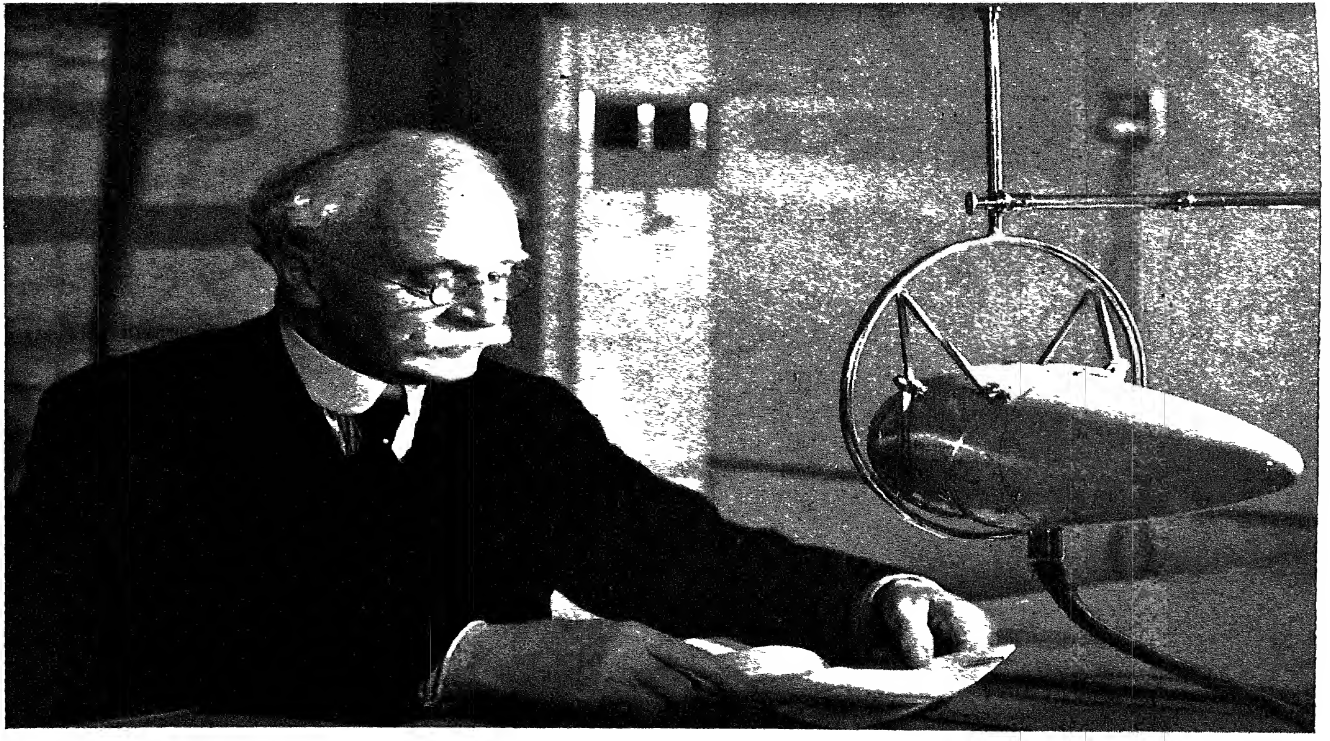
more to the Left of the imaginary middle line than the Right. His own views are clearly expressed in a memorandum which he circulated to his colleagues regarding the form of the final report, and in a letter on the same subject to Professor Gutteridge. Both documents made it clear that, as his colleague Sir Philip Gibbs has observed, Spender, with all his moderation in cross-examination and discussion, never favoured anything in the nature of a white-washing report. As the most experienced writer on the Commission he was critical of the form and arrangement of the draft report, and where he wanted it altered he wanted it strengthened. He wrote, for example, to Gutteridge: "I cannot see the necessity for all this mealy-mouthing about armament firms and officers and officials [i.e. the habit of such firms of appointing generals and admirals and high civil servants to their boards of directors as soon as they have retired from Government service]. If we have not taken evidence enough to convict we have certainly not taken enough to acquit, and it will be said that if we had probed a little deeper we should have discovered a great many more cases like those we unearthed. Their denial that they solicit orders is obvious nonsense in view of the fact that they pay their agents by commission, and that those agents must solicit or starve; the concealment of bribery under commission is a rather mean subterfuge."

In speaking thus plainly of bribery Spender was basing himself on the evidence before the Commission, or what he considered a fair inference from the evidence. In his memorandum he wrote on that point: "Export by the Private Firms is liable to serious abuse. . . . We should not accept the plea of Messrs. —— and other firms that they do not *seek* business. Their agents, being paid on commission, must seek business, and some of them do it by corrupt methods for which their principals supply the funds. The plea that business can only be got in this way becomes specially objectionable in the case of lethal weapons. The way to stop this sort of business is to let daylight into it, and we should do that to the best of our ability and not mince words about it." It should also be noted that, strongly opposed though Spender was on general grounds to the nationalisation of the arms industry, he made the reservation that "if an international system for the control and reduction of armaments could be devised which required uniformity, we ought to fall in, even at some cost or loss to ourselves". That opinion would have been more important if the prospect of such international agreement had been brighter.

In the end the Commission produced a unanimous report, too

moderate to please the Left, but drastic enough to alarm the Right. It declared against nationalisation on the ground, among others, that the needs of Imperial defence required the elasticity in production which private manufacture provided; it acquitted the armament firms of the crime of deliberately fomenting war-scares; it recommended that the Government assume *control* of the arms industry in the United Kingdom, organising and regulating collaboration between the industry and the State, and that a Minister of Supply be appointed for this purpose; that the profits of the industry be severely limited; that a much more rigid licensing system for exports, particularly exports of aircraft, be instituted; and that private export-trade in second-hand arms and munitions be prohibited altogether. The report was published on 31st October 1936. Ramsay MacDonald, who was no longer Prime Minister, but still a member of the Cabinet, wrote Spender an appreciative letter and said he would like to talk to him, but there is no evidence that he ever did. At any rate the report was pushed firmly into a pigeon-hole. As things turned out that mattered little, for in less than three years Great Britain was at war, and under the stress of that overmastering emergency the essential measures proposed by the Commission—Government control of the arms industry, appointment of a Minister of Supply, rigorous limitation of profits—were all promptly adopted. Whether they will survive the passing of the emergency time will show. In any case Spender's work on a Royal Commission once more yielded a late harvest.

As for Spender himself, he played without question a most valuable part on the Commission. One of his colleagues wrote to him at the time: "You saved the situation. But for your intervention the extremes would have flown apart." Another writes in retrospect: "When the report came to be drawn up Spender revealed his fine qualities of moral sensitiveness and intelligent idealism. . . . In a way it [the report] was characteristic of Spender's own mind, liberal and progressive, but not revolutionary." It is worth remembering that "you saved the situation" is what Herbert Gladstone wrote of Spender's (and Acland's) part in getting Grey and Haldane into the Liberal Government in Decembee 1905. It was something of a habit.



Broadcasting, 1940

British Broadcasting Corporation

Chapter XIV

IN JOURNEYINGS OFTEN

Spender could not be described as a great traveller as journalistic travelling, particularly the travelling of American journalists, goes in these days, but he managed over a considerable span of years to see something of three continents besides his own. In early days going abroad meant going to Italy or the French Riviera, or perhaps Germany or Normandy, for the annual holiday, limited to six weeks. It was not till 1911, when Spender had been nearly nineteen years on the *Westminster*, and editor of it for nearly sixteen, that more ambitious travels proved possible. The Coronation Durbar at Delhi was to be held in the autumn of that year, and every London paper was sending out a special correspondent to describe it. Spender decided that he would go himself for the *Westminster*, encouraged the more thereto by a cordial invitation from an old friend, Sir George Roos-Keppel, then High Commissioner of the North West Provinces. Between then and 1932, the date of the last of the longer tours, Spender spent some months in Egypt (as a member of the Milner Mission) in 1919-20, and again in 1931; he went to the United States in 1921 (for the Washington Naval Conference) and again in 1927; he revisited India in 1926; and went on what was purely a pleasure-trip, the only purely pleasure-trip he ever undertook outside Europe, to the West Indies in 1932-3. The journeys, as might be expected, yielded some hundreds of articles, and three books.

The first visit to India might well have been the second, for in 1907 W. T. Stead conceived an ill-advised project for a visit of English Liberal journalists to India to make common cause with Indian National Congress speakers who were agitating against certain prosecutions of newspapers by the Government. A. G. Gardiner was approached, and wrote to ask Spender what he thought. Spender in reply wrote:

> "Stead put the same question to me a few weeks ago, and I replied after some thinking about it that I did not see my way to go or to send a nominee. I told him I thought a few good journalists might do real service by going out and talking privately with the leaders of the Indian movement and editors of

the native press, but that public meetings or conferences in connection with the National Congress seemed to me to have explosive possibilities which no one could predict in the present state of India. Personally I have much faith in J. M.'s [John Morley's] method of dealing with the native press, but he can only get along from day to day by turning the blind eye to an immense quantity of writing which gives his officials every kind of formal and legal justification for urging prosecutions, and I should feel that I was doing him an ungrateful turn if I went to India and joined with the authors of these writings in protests against his policy or denunciations of him on the score of the few prosecutions he has sanctioned."

Between Stead's impetuosity and Spender's sanity no responsible person could hesitate long. Certainly Gardiner did not, though there was small prospect of his being persuaded by Stead in any case.

But the result was that Spender's visit to India in 1911 (he was, of course, accompanied as usual by Mrs. Spender) was his first, and it might reasonably be called unique, for Coronation Durbars do not happen twice in a generation. The description of the dazzling scene almost baffled even his able pen, but the chapter on it in his *Men and Things* still makes admirable reading. His role as Special Correspondent was, of course, primarily that of the detached observer, but one incident in which he unintentionally got involved provided yet one more example of the unobtrusive influence he was on occasion capable of exerting. The journalists at the Durbar were accommodated in two camps, one for the British, one for the Indians. Spender, as what seemed to him a matter of course, went to pay his respects to his Indian colleagues, and was told by the President of the group, who greeted him warmly, that he was the first Englishman to write his name in their book, though they had been installed there for ten days. The next day he received an invitation to dine with the Indians, and accepted it. This created an immediate scandal among the resident English journalists, who told him he was obviously ignorant of the conventions, and insisted that he must get out of his engagement on some plea or other. Spender refused with some warmth, and duly attended the dinner. Whatever consequences that might have had were averted by a singularly opportune chance. Lord Stamfordham, the King's secretary, asked Spender to suggest to him privately any little thing the King might do with advantage outside the

official programme. Spender seized the opportunity, mentioned the recent incident and said he thought it would be an excellent thing if an equerry could be sent to inscribe His Majesty's name in the books at *both* the journalists' camps. The suggestion was at once adopted, with the result that every personage great and small connected with the Durbar precipitately inscribed himself in the Indians' book, the most censorious of Spender's critics not excepted.

The Durbar over, Spender spent a few weeks seeing something of India, touring in Rajputana and visiting Simla, Peshawar and the Khyber Pass. The result for the *Westminster* was a series of unsigned articles which, among other effects, prompted Sir Theodore Morison, Permanent Under-Secretary at the India Office, to write and ask who was responsible for work so excellent, and which were subsequently reprinted (partly at the instigation of Morley, who was still in the Cabinet, though no longer Secretary for India) in a little volume called *The Indian Scene*.

It was 1926 before Spender, with Mrs. Spender, went to India again, and the interval was long enough to make comparisons instructive. Much had changed. The war—the First German War—in which India had played a ready and valuable part, had intervened. Indians had sat in the Imperial War Cabinet. The Morley-Minto Councils—a small first instalment of democratic government—had given place to the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, with dyarchy* in the provinces, not at the centre, as the salient feature. But above all Spender found the political atmosphere changed immensely for the better, barriers broken down, a large measure of social equality between Indians and English, and in his own profession (a welcome contrast to the Delhi Durbar relations) a marked cordiality between the men of the two races.

Spender's travels in India need not be traced in detail. The full story of them may be found in his book *The Changing East*, which appeared in the autumn of 1926 after his return to England. He saw many of the natural marvels of India like Kinchinjunga (but not Everest), and its architectural marvels like the Taj Mahal. He visited Tagore at Santineketan, Gandhi at Ahmedabad and the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar (whose exploits he had applauded on many a June afternoon at Lords or the Oval) at Jamnagar. Political developments he watched with a discerning eye, quickly reaching

*Dual rule—"transferred" subjects like agriculture and education being entrusted completely to Indian Ministers, while "reserved", like finance and police, were kept in the hands of the Governors.

the conviction that dyarchy, however interesting as an experiment or useful as a transitional stage, could not long endure—a conclusion that the Simon Commission, which a few years later prepared the way for the Government of India Act of 1935, decisively endorsed.

Of the talks with the three typical but very different Indians just mentioned that with the Jam Sahib was, a little surprisingly, by far the most instructive. The visit to Santineketan seems to have derived interest much more from the spectacle of what Tagore had done there than from anything Tagore himself had to say, and Gandhi's contribution to the settlement of the Indian problem centred almost exclusively on the spinning-wheel. At Jamnagar a completely different note was struck. Nawanagar, of course, was and is a minor State—one of the smaller ones, about the size of three average English counties, with a population of 400,000 —with the Jam Sahib as, at first sight, its benevolent despot. At first sight only, for Prince Ranjitsinhji had three Cabinet Ministers, his municipalities managed their own local affairs, and so, in a different way, did the villages. But the patriarchal element was still strong. The ruler was both the father of his people and the dispenser of justice. Spender accompanied him on one of his annual visits of inspection to a group of outlying villages, and was as deeply impressed by his ability as judge and the unquestioning acquiescence of the litigants as he had been by the enlightened activities of the administration in such all-important matters as irrigation and water-storage. The picture indeed is of a thoroughly efficient administration and a completely contented people—more contented, it may well be, in their present stage of development under that form of government than under a pattern of democracy based on Westminster or the Capitol or the Palais Bourbon. Some such thought clearly crossed Spender's mind, as it could hardly fail to do. His comment on his visit to Nawanagar was: "If there were only five hundred men like the Jam Sahib in India—men trained and educated in England, but knowing India as only Indians know it—and they had each half a million Indians to look after, some part of the Indian problem would be solved." There are in fact, of course, more than five hundred Indians with that experience both of English institutions and Indian needs, but not unfortunately five hundred with the unusual qualities of the enlightened ruler of Nawanagar.

In writing of Spender's journey in 1926 I have begun with India for the sake of the link with the earlier visit in 1911-12, but actually he spent some time on the way east in Turkey and Egypt. He

reached Constantinople through the gale of a life-time at the end of 1925, just two years after Turkey had been declared a republic, with Mustapha Kemal as President. It was a good moment for an English journalist to visit the rejuvenated—or reconditioned—State. The first signs of its resolute modernisation met Spender *en voyage* at Brindisi, where two lorry-loads of crates full of hats were shipped, the Ghazi having just banned the traditional fez under heavy penalties. Modernisation of another kind was in evidence at Ankara, whither Spender journeyed in defiance of many anxious counsellors concerned for his personal safety, at a moment when the League of Nations was about to give a verdict, thought likely to be adverse to Turkey and favourable to Britain, on the future of the province of Mosul in what was then still commonly called Mesopotamia. The emblem of modernity here was the Parliament, by which the republic set great store, and the President of it discussed earnestly with Spender the question whether its procedure was more akin to the French or the British model. This, as has been said, was at Ankara. Another aspect of that remote but rising capital was the square on which Spender's hotel (a courtesy title, little merited) looked. It was the traditional place of public execution; fourteen individuals had just been strung up there, and six more were awaiting similar treatment. Spender's visit, by a fortunate dispensation, fell in the interval between the two events.

From Ankara, Spender returned to Constantinople, and had the advantage of discussing his impressions with the British Ambassador, Sir Ronald Lindsay, and the head of the well-known American-founded Robert College, Dr. G. F. Gates. Impressions, on the whole, they had to remain, for the new republic was still too new for anything like fixed conclusions to be justified. One conclusion, none the less, Spender did reach, that, whatever the façade of Parliamentary institutions, the real and sole ruler of Turkey was Mustapha Kemal, whom he saw only, but did not interview. That, no doubt, was true, and Spender had reason for questioning what would happen when in the course of time that strong hand was removed. He lived, in fact, to see Turkey maintain her equilibrium with considerable success under a constitution resembling, certainly in appearance and to some extent in reality, western democratic models.

From Constantinople Spender, en route for India, went first to Egypt, familiar enough to him from the months he had spent there in 1920 as a member of the Milner Mission. This time his stay

was short. He talked politics with the new High Commissioner, Lord Lloyd, and with various Egyptian party leaders. It was a difficult time, with the whole situation unsettled and unsatisfactory, for the recommendations of the Milner Mission had been rejected by the British Cabinet, and the necessary limitations on Egypt's independence (retention of British troops etc.) had been imposed unilaterally instead of arranged by agreement. Egypt felt itself still under British domination, and any Egyptian Government could be upset by nationalists exploiting the always latent (except when effervescent) anti-British feeling. From the atmosphere thus engendered Spender turned with relief to study of the wonders of the Cairo museum, to which the great gold coffin of Tutankhamen was brought while he was actually there. Having watched Mr. Howard Carter patiently and methodically excavating the tombs in 1920, he took a more than ordinary interest in the treasures exhumed and now on exhibition in the museum at Cairo. But his time was limited, and having examined and marvelled he continued his journey to Bombay.

He was in Egypt again in 1931 for a third and last visit. This time politics figured little in his activities. The general situation was not good, for the Labour Government's attempts at a treaty with Egypt had broken down. But Spender was bent this time on seeing aspects of Egypt which he had had little opportunity of studying in the stress of the Milner Mission work in 1920, or during what was no more than a call *en passant* in 1926. What was more, he went far south, into the Sudan, and was both impressed and fascinated by all he saw of the effects of British administration on some of the most primitive peoples he had ever encountered. But first there were experiences of interest in Cairo, one of them a visit to the little-known Moslem monastery of the Mevlevis, famous for its dancing priests. Spender was fortunate enough to witness one of their remarkable performances, and has left a lively description of it on record. He went again to the museum, and lingered among the Tutankhamen relics, and then began a leisurely and supremely restful journey up the Nile, past the great rock-temple of Abu Simbel, to Wady Halfa on the Sudan frontier, and so on to Khartoum and Omdurman. He traced the British line on the battlefield, remembering perhaps (or perhaps forgetting) the part Lieut. Winston Churchill, of the 21st Lancers, had played in that decisive engagement thirty-three years earlier. He stayed at Khartoum with the Governor-General, Sir John Maffey, on the site of the earlier palace where Gordon died. He visited and

admired Gordon College; he conceived an equal admiration for the Anglican Bishop of Egypt and the Sudan, Dr. L. H. Gwynne; he studied the enterprises of the Sudan Plantations Syndicate; and went on, by train, to the great Sennar Dam on the Blue Nile. In that he had reason to feel a peculiar interest, for though he had never seen it he had described it realistically, from information supplied him, in his *Life of Lord Cowdray*, published in the previous year; for it was Cowdray's firm, S. Pearson and Co., which had been responsible for the vast undertaking. Now he could test the accuracy of his own description, and seems not to have found it seriously at fault.

From Sennar he struck west to El Obeid, the capital of Kordofan Province—a town of 30,000 human inhabitants, with about as many camels, dogs, donkeys, cows, vultures and hoopoes. He stayed there with the Governor, Mr. (now Sir) Angus Gillan, a former Oxford rowing blue, and admired the genuine satisfaction which he and the few other British officials took in their administrative work, remote from civilisation and surrounded by the desert. Blues, indeed, abounded in the Sudan. In addition to Gillan, Spender met, among others, R. V. Bardsley, the Oxford and Lancashire cricketer, who was Governor of the Blue Nile Province, and the Governor of the White Nile Province, Mr. A. G. Pawson, another Oxford cricket blue. Nothing impressed him more than the ability with which they and a handful of young university men were administering vast areas, and their genuine devotion to the strange populations under their charge. Of these the strangest, perhaps, were the Nubas, living round a township with the curiously transatlantic name of Dilling, and going about their varied vocations for the most part stark naked, a practice which has obviously much to commend it some twelve degrees from the Equator. Here again the District Commissioner, not ten years down from Oxford, is spoken of as "loving his job", though a little concerned lest the encroachments of an undesired civilisation should demoralise a people perfectly happy as they were and attractive through their utter simplicity. At Dueim, on the White Nile, Spender attended a native court, the Governor, himself only a spectator, interpreting the proceedings for him. Thence back to Khartoum, first by car, and then across the Nile in a felucca directed by a navigator who admitted he had never sailed a felucca before, and who quite possibly never would have again if he had not been summarily commanded to reef the sail and resort to more irksome but less perilous propulsion by oars.

That particular tour ended in Palestine. Spender entered that controversial country resolved that no word betraying bias towards either Jew or Arab should pass his lips, and his views on the burning issue soon became so pronounced that he was doubly conscious of the unwisdom of giving expression to them. He saw and heard and formed conclusions—and kept them to himself. For the rest he visited the scenes consecrated by centuries of tradition, noting the flowers on the hills round Nazareth, sketching Hermon and the Sea of Galilee and Bethlehem, and carrying away with him, perhaps to sow experimentally in his Kent garden, a blackened grain of wheat, taken from a newly excavated house at Jericho.

Spender's travels in the east were nicely balanced by his travels in the west. It is rather surprising that his first visit to America came late enough in life to allow him to spend his sixtieth birthday there —that in spite of his interest in the United States, the invitations he had had while Bryce was Ambassador at Washington and the talk there had been of his succeeding Bryce. He went in the autumn of 1921 to the Naval Conference which opened at Washington on November 12th, and the articles he cabled from there were the first work he did for the morning *Westminster*, which had begun its career less than a fortnight earlier; he was at the same time writing a daily article for the *New York Evening Post*. Spender was one of a small group of British journalists who crossed the Atlantic on different dates by different ships (he and I were both on the *Aquitania*) to gather in due course in the fine Continental Hall in the building housing the Daughters of the American Revolution, where what turned out one of the most remarkable of international conferences was held. Wickham Steed was there for *The Times*, Repington for the *Telegraph*, H. W. Nevinson for the *Manchester Guardian*, and H. G. Wells went out to write special articles for the *Daily Mail* till his plain words about the French delegation and its policy proved more than Lord Northcliffe, just then in a particularly francophile humour, could stomach.

For an Englishman visiting America, as Spender was, for the first time it was a sufficiently notable experience, though Washington is not the United States, and the exigencies of his work tied him to Washington throughout. But if that prevented him, and the rest of us, from seeing much of America, there was a unique opportunity of seeing many of the most prominent Americans. With President Harding Spender came in no closer touch than the formalities of a White House reception permit, but the Sec-

retary of State, Charles Evans Hughes and his fellow delegate, a former Secretary of State, Elihu Root, were more accessible (I forget whether Spender was one of the group to whom Mr. Hughes told his story of the man who said he once spent a fortnight in Philadelphia on a Sunday afternoon), while yet another former holder of that high office, William Jennings Bryan, was writing for some paper and had his place among the journalists. One pathetic and forgotten figure sitting helpless by his study fire in a Washington suburb Spender, I think, did not see, profound though his respect for Woodrow Wilson had been and still was.

The story of the Washington Conference is familiar, and it need not be retold here. Spender stood in no different relation to it from any other journalist. He attended the public sessions, conspicuous among them the opening one, when Mr. Hughes electrified the world (and the British Delegation as much as anyone in the world) by proposing the destruction of nearly two millions of naval tonnage; he wrote his articles; he joined in the intimate and valuable private talks which Balfour, or the British Ambassador, Sir Auckland Geddes, arranged from time to time as the conference pursued its appointed course. The general opinion was that it had achieved striking success—it had at all events resulted in a real, visible and substantial reduction in existing armaments—but Spender was, and remained, less impressed by what it did than by what it might have done. He was convinced that if France had shown a reasonably open mind regarding land disarmament, as other States did regarding naval, President Harding would have gone forward with a plan he was secretly cherishing for a wide international agreement, which would include the cancellation of war-debts. I never, I am bound to add, heard anyone but Spender advance this thesis, which he rested on some words used by a White House spokesman, but he had no doubts about what was in Harding's mind, and he never ceased to lament that what he regarded as a better chance for a general settlement than ever recurred later should have been so sacrificed. He himself stayed in Washington, with an occasional flying visit to New York, for the whole three months the conference lasted. His tasks there did not so completely occupy his mind as to preclude him from considering earnestly one decision he had to make—whether to remain editor of the *Westminster* in its new form as a morning paper. Actually he never had much doubt, and as soon as he got back to London in the middle of February (1922) his resignation was announced.

His second, and only other, visit to the United States, six years later, gave him far better opportunities to see and understand the country. Walter Hines Page, who, as American Ambassador in London during almost the whole of the First German War, had rendered this country invaluable service in the years when the United States was still neutral, had died in 1918, and the English-Speaking Union a few years later founded in his memory a Fellowship designed to enable individual British journalists to travel in the United States, with a special view to making contacts with American fellow-craftsmen. With much wisdom (though the choice, perhaps, was obvious) the Union selected Spender as the first holder of the Fellowship. He was at this time writing regularly for the many papers of the Cowdray, or Pearson group, but there was no difficulty about his temporary release, Lord Cowdray expressing warm satisfaction at the prospective tour. Accordingly Spender, with Mrs. Spender, left London early in October 1927. This time again he spent about three months in the United States —penetrating into Canada no further than the Canadian side of the Niagara River. But the Union itself was seen and studied comprehensively, Spender's itinerary taking him from New York by way of Boston and Niagara to Detroit and Chicago, south to Kansas City, across to San Francisco, and back in a south-eastern sweep to Santa Barbara, Los Angeles and the Grand Canyon to New Orleans. From that old French centre he turned north-east, by Atlanta and Norfolk (Virginia) and after ten days in Washington got back to New York for a fortnight before sailing again for home.

Such a tour was an enlightening experience, the more so since in 1921-2 Spender might almost be said to have spent three months on American soil without seeing America, so closely was he tied to Washington by the Naval Conference. It was therefore a virtually new impression which America made on him, which accounts for the freshness that marks almost every page of the book, *The America of To-day*, which he published a few months after returning home. It was not, of course, a materially different America from the America every casual traveller saw. But Spender was not a casual traveller. He had crossed the Atlantic under conditions which laid a certain responsibility on him, and he viewed the scenes around him with the eye of a trained observer, accustomed, without overlooking what might lie on the surface, to form sound judgements on what might lie beneath it. His concern was specially with American journalists, and apart from the leading men on

New York and Boston or Chicago papers he was able to make profitable contact with others who by their ability and personality had conferred recognised distinction on journals with an inconsiderable circulation in some secondary centre—such for example as Henry J. Allen of Wichita, William Allen White of Emporia, and Henry Haskell of Kansas City (though Kansas City is not to be described as a secondary centre). Crowded lunches arranged by the chief newspapers and addressed by Spender were a feature of the tour. In New York before he left he addressed the students in journalism at New York University, giving what the Director of the Department of Journalism described as "one of the finest talks I have ever heard on the preparation for newspaper work". He was considerably impressed, incidentally, by finding in one town the lift operator at his hotel discussing the university course he was taking, and in another by recognising in two porters at the railway station students he had seen in the audience at a lecture he had given at the local university or college the night before. These are, no doubt, commonplaces of American university life, but they had not yet become commonplaces to him.

Spender, of course, made many speeches—as every Englishman of any consequence visiting America does and must—at universities, colleges and schools, and at various dinners and luncheons elsewhere. Such activities, in view of his wide knowledge, breadth of mind and soundness of judgment, could not fail to be of public value, and evidence that they were is provided by a letter from that most sagacious of American public men, Colonel E. M. House, a few days after Spender had sailed for home. After expressing regret that he had not seen him to say good-bye, House added:

> "It may hearten you to know that your visit and talks have made a profound impression upon intelligent American opinion. You were wise to disregard the advice of those who counselled caution in speaking of the three controversial issues between your country and ours. What you said has had a beneficial influence and will leaven public thought on those subjects".

The three controversial issues of the moment were, no doubt, war-debts, naval disarmament and tariffs.

Fortifying himself against the inevitable onslaughts of interviewers, Spender prepared a farewell statement which (though perhaps a little too reminiscent of a *Westminster* leader for its

immediate purpose) summarised the chief conclusions he had reached after three months' travel in America. Three things, he said, had struck him particularly. "First, that impalpable but supremely important thing, the American spirit, which critics of American institutions were so apt to miss, a thing belonging to the whole country, and giving it, in spite of its differences of race, climate and natural features, its unity and individual character; next, the perpetual stimulation of wants, in contrast with the European ideal of thrift and contentedness; and third, the pervading sense of equality, giving real value to the American profession of democracy, and providing the career open to talents for all comers. This sense of equality, if guarded by public opinion against the intrusion of wealth, should save the United States from the class-conflicts of Europe." That thesis was developed at some length in a statement which judiciously mingled appreciation and candour.

Though this, as has been said, was Spender's last visit to the United States (the American Newspaper Proprietors Association invited him in 1930, but he could not go) it was not his last to the Western Hemisphere. In 1932 he went with Mrs. Spender on what was purely a holiday tour to the West Indies. It was a winter holiday, as Spender's holidays so often were, beginning in December and ending in February. It began incidentally with a typical Bay of Biscay storm, which swiftly reduced the population of the dining-saloon from three hundred to about a dozen, Spender being among the dozen. (His success in curing himself of sea-sickness—he was originally a miserable sailor—must be reckoned one of the achievements of his life. Though he described the process to me more than once I never fully comprehended the technique; fundamentally it consisted in diagnosing the vagaries of the ship and schooling the body to conform with them instead of resisting them). The storm prevented the vessel from touching at the Azores, and her passengers first set foot on shore at Bermuda. Thence the voyage continued to Jamaica and Dominica, St. Vincent and Trinidad, each successive island in the sequence, with its wealth of colour and luxuriance of vegetation, seeming to Spender more lovely than the last. The return was by way of Casablanca, scene of one international event with which Spender was abundantly familiar, and ten years later to figure in another which he did not live to hear of.

There travel on any considerable scale ended. For the remaining ten years of his life Spender went no further afield than France—apart from one forty-eight-hours visit to Geneva.

Chapter XV

LIBERAL TWILIGHT

The story of Spender's association with Liberalism is the story of his life, and some attempt has been made to tell that story in these pages. His formal association with the Liberal party in any position of prominence is another matter. That began in 1926. When he was in India in that year a telegram reached him in March at Bombay, reading:

> "Do personally beg you accept unanimous nomination of executive for office of President National Liberal Federation for next year your consent of immense value to party at this juncture—Oxford"

Whether or not Spender would have accepted in any case, it is certain that such an appeal from Lord Oxford was calculated to dispel any but the most obdurate hesitations. At any rate the answer was Yes, and Spender was duly installed as President in June. It was at best no enviable office at that particular juncture. What was left of the Liberal—"Liberal without suffix or affix"—Party was in a melancholy state. The process of disintegration had begun with the change of Government in December 1916, when Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister. It was carried a step further in May 1918, when the Maurice debate in the House of Commons ranged Asquith Liberals openly against the Liberals of the Coalition; and further still when at the General Election of December 1918 Lloyd George proclaimed the proscription of all Liberals who had voted against him in that debate.

In 1922 the Coalition Government came to an end, and a more or less reunited Liberal party won 158 seats at the General Election of 1923. But the reconciliation was short-lived. Elections cannot be fought without substantial funds, but Mr. Lloyd George, as Liberal chief of the Coalition Government, had been furnished with substantial resources by various wealthy Liberals. When party politics was resumed, and Lloyd George and his followers made common cause with Asquith and the Asquithians, it was not unnaturally supposed that the two party funds would be merged. But Lloyd George did not take that view. He regarded

his fund as still separate and under his own control, and was only prepared to make grants from it on conditions formulated by himself. As Spender admitted, that was intelligible if the fund was really a personal appanage of the late Prime Minister, and not provided for normal party purposes, but among the Independent Liberals there were the strongest scruples against purchasing reunion on such terms, and the old split was in consequence reopened. The result of the controversy and its effect on the party was the reduction of Liberal representation in the House of Commons from 158 before the General Election of 1924 to 42 after it. The fissure became final with the sharp division between Lord Oxford and Mr. Lloyd George over the General Strike of 1926, the former unreservedly condemning, and the latter appearing in a large measure to condone, the action of the strikers.

It was in such circumstances that Spender in June 1926 assumed the Presidency of the National Liberal Federation (a body representing all the local Liberal Associations throughout the country) which he had accepted when in India in response to Lord Oxford's cable. Four months later, in October, Lord Oxford resigned the leadership of the Liberal Party, an event which Spender deplored, though comprehendingly, in a letter already quoted.* Soon after this the Administrative Committee of the Federation met to take a final decision on whether to accept, in return for subventions from Mr. Lloyd George's money, Mr. Lloyd George's conditions—which involved various changes painful to Spender, since they affected his close friends, in the Liberal Central Office personnel. Some indication of the atmosphere prevailing may be derived from passages in a letter from Spender to Mrs. Spender on December 10th, 1926.

"The manœuvres," he wrote, "are endless. . . . The N.L.F. Secretary, Oldman, gives me a hint that my re-nomination as President [it was usual to hold this office for several years] may—this probably means *will*—be opposed when the Executive meets again in January. I have told him that I shall be abroad on January 19th, the date of the meeting, and that no doubt it will be less embarrassing to them to do this agreeable thing in my absence. In the meantime I am going to tell the Executive Committee next Wednesday that after the way the Ll-G-ites have treated me nothing would induce me to sit in the chair of that committee again."

He did tell them that, and at the meeting at which his statement

*p. 87.

was made a resolution accepting the Lloyd George money was carried by 19 votes to 15. In a letter to his wife telling her of this Spender added: "Grey is very serious about following up his speech, and I think even now we may see the beginning of a new Liberal Party." It was not a new party, but a new organisation. The decision of the Administrative Committee of the N.L.F. was regarded by the defeated minority as the sale of the Liberal machine to the Lloyd George faction, and there was a danger that in consequence of it many prominent Liberals would drop out of political life altogether. To avert that a new organisation, known as the Liberal Council, was immediately created, largely at the instigation, and under the leadership, of the most weighty and respected of Liberal Elder Statesmen, Lord Grey of Fallodon. Among those most closely associated with him from the outset were Spender and Gilbert Murray, and Spender became a member of the Executive Committee. The inaugural meeting was held in February 1927, and in his Presidential address Grey made a point of explaining that the new body was created to meet the needs of Liberals who, while they had no further use for the N.L.F., still hoped for some political home. It stood simply for free and independent Liberalism; it was not a disintegrating force; it was formed to arrest disintegration.

Of this body Grey remained President till his death in September 1933, when a universal desire was expressed that his successor should be Spender. His views were identical with Grey's on virtually every political issue, including the Ottawa agreements of 1932, regarding which Grey had written to a colleague on the Liberal Council: "Personally I feel so strongly about Ottawa that if I were a member of the Government I should come out." (The Liberal members of the Government did in fact come out shortly afterwards, much to Spender's satisfaction). But Spender could not see his way to accepting the proffered post. The complete freedom he had always enjoyed in his political writing (except for certain temporary but painful vicissitudes) was due largely to the fact that he had identified himself with no political organisation, and therefore committed no one but himself and his paper by what he wrote. That consideration prevailed with him now; he declined nomination, and his friend Lord Rhayader (Leif Jones) became President. But the same decision had soon to be faced again. Lord Rhayader died in 1936, and once more the obvious successor was Spender. This time he yielded, not because the earlier reasons for declining had lost their validity, but because

his conviction of the need for, and the value of, such a body as the Liberal Council was so strong that when the demand for his services was presented a second time he felt he could no longer withhold them.

There is not a great deal to be said of the work of the Council under his chairmanship. It represented only a fragment of what was left of organised Liberalism (of unorganised and, so to say, immanent Liberalism in Great Britain there was abundance), and while it served as rallying-ground for many of the ablest and sincerest Liberals in the country its influence on national political opinion was not considerable. When war broke out in 1939 the Council, like other political organisations, suspended all activities, and Spender was still President of the temporarily dormant body at the time of his death in 1942.

But before the war came Spender had found himself involved in political complications once more. As Hitler's aggression increased the Government's policy caused a yet further split in the Liberal Party and its various organisations. Spender was of those who took the view that in all the circumstances, and having regard in particular to the state of British armaments, no other policy but the Government's was possible, and that it was dishonest and dishonourable to attack Ministers for it. On that issue he resigned his membership of the Executive of the Liberal Organisation Committee, which had succeeded the National Liberal Federation when the latter body failed to survive the Lloyd George Fund controversies. A passage from his letter on that subject to Lord Meston, the Chairman of the Liberal Organisation Committee, indicates instructively the relation between his habitual realism and his native Liberalism.

> "Whatever line," he wrote, "is taken, I would plead for some coherence in it. The Committee demands that we should 'stand up' to Germany, yet when I suggest that, if this is the object in view, we ought to conciliate Italy, I am instantly told that I am betraying Liberal principles. No one seems to mind that in a war with Germany the defence of the Empire would be 50 per cent more difficult with a hostile Italy than with a friendly one. Or if I say there is a limit to British power and that we cannot pledge ourselves simultaneously to all causes—China, Spain, Abyssinia, Czechoslovakia—which excite Liberal sympathies without inviting disaster, I bring on my head the same reproaches. Personally I sympathise with most of these causes,

but I do plead for some distinction between what we *wish* and what with our resources and liabilities we *can* perform."

At the same time he offered his resignation of the Presidency of the Liberal Council. The members of that body, he knew, were much more of his own mind on current issues than the Liberal Organisation Committee, but he was, as always, anxious about his freedom as a writer.

"Really," he wrote to Vivian Phillipps, a member of the Executive of the Council, "I ought not to have been President. For a man who writes on politics and, especially in times like these, cannot stop to consult other people, the position is too equivocal. I rapidly get to a point from which I cannot retreat, but I have no right to assume that an organisation will follow, and they may fairly complain that I have committed them without their consent."

(The date of the letter to Lord Meston is October 12th, 1938, that of the second letter October 13th). But the Liberal Council did not complain. On the contrary, Spender was urged at least to hold his resignation in abeyance, with the result that, as has been said, he was still President at the time of his death.

At the time of his death too he could happily look back on a large measure of reconciliation with his friends of the Liberal Organisation Committee. His letters to *The Times* in July 1939* had marked a dividing-line, evoking the criticisms of many Liberals and the warm appreciation of many others, but the war submerged most of such differences, and this among them. From the end of 1939 Spender could attend no meetings, and only come to London at all very rarely, but with all his time on his hands he spent much of it in writing letters as well as in writing articles, and kept in close touch with whatever was happening in the Liberal world. Towards the end of 1941 his friend Herbert Worsley, with characteristic thoughtfulness, suggested to Lord Meston that Spender should be asked to write the next issue of the *Westminster Newsletter*, a sheet on current politics issued periodically by the Liberal Organisation Committee. Meston readily consented to the proposition, Spender readily accepted it, and a letter of 19th November to Worlsey shows how happy a result had been achieved.

See p. 170.

"I can hardly tell you," wrote the disabled warrior, "what a pleasure the *Newsletter* incident has been to me. Honestly I did not think the first part of it would be acceptable, but when Archie Sinclair writes his warm thanks there does not seem to be much doubt on that point. For me the most disagreeable experience of those years was being excommunicated from the old party—receiving angry letters from people who seemed to think I had some secret sympathy with Hitler and Hitlerism, though I had, for years before others got on to it, sent for their documents, and was writing books and articles scarifying it."

That thesis had been stated more fully in an earlier letter to Worsley, and in justice to Spender one paragraph of it ought to be quoted. What he wrote was:

"Of course I know all about the scrape I have been in since 1934, when in a little book published that year [*These Times*, which the Prime Minister of Canada praised so highly] I expressed my doubt whether the Constitution of the League would enable it to stand up against a military challenge. Then I became a member of the Royal Commission on Armaments, and its secret sessions gave me clues which I afterwards followed up. For three years I carried about with me the deadly secret of British and German armaments, which made me think it imperative not to force any issue until we had provided ourselves with the minimum necessary to escape disaster when war broke out. This brought me into collision with the Sinclairite Liberals, who insisted on interpreting it as 'appeasement'. I was for challenging Hitler the moment we had the equipment that enabled us to win the 'Battle of Britain' and always asked for the date when it was thought that we could take up the diplomatic initiative. The date given me was end of March 1939. From that time I was on the warpath like the rest."

That was a throw-back to the past. Now antagonisms were buried, the breach was healed and Spender died happy. If to put it thus is to exaggerate in some degree the relations between a cause and an effect, it is certain at any rate that he could never have died happy if his last days had been shadowed by alienation from the mass of those who professed a creed to whose inculcation the whole of his public and private life had been devoted.

Chapter XVI

THE LAST CHAPTER

The last twenty years of Spender's life form a single chapter, and it had its chequered aspects. It is easy to conceive what the ending of the *Westminster* meant for him. For close on thirty years his whole life had revolved round the paper. For close on thirty years he had spoken through its columns to the world, and had abundant proof that the world—at any rate the people who counted most in the world's affairs, and not in Great Britain only—was listening. Now all that was finished, and Spender was nearly sixty; that is late in life for a man to make a complete new start. It is true, of course, that theoretically the *Westminster* was not ending; it was only becoming a morning instead of an evening paper. Spender might still have his platform, and a larger one; that was what its proprietor Lord Cowdray hoped and genuinely believed. Spender fully recognised his proprietor's right to do what seemed best to him in such a case. But he knew that if in making the change Cowdray was relying on his own judgement he was wrong, and if on other people's he was being ill advised. He himself made no complaint and felt no grievance. But he had a vital decision to take. He could, if he chose, be Editor of the morning *Westminster* as he had been of the evening; that indeed was Cowdray's desire. There were arguments for either course. To carry on would for one thing mean night work, and night work presses hard on family life. We find Spender indeed writing to Mrs. Spender to assure her that papers no longer went to press in the early hours; their first editions were away before ten, and he ought himself with luck to leave the office by seven. But he could never have believed that would be really possible; no editor can be happy till he has seen at least the first edition through.

A larger question was whether he should take responsibility for a ship that he was convinced would never float, with the certainty of involving himself ultimately in the inevitable wreck. On the other hand did not loyalty require him to stand by his staff and make life as easy as he could for them in the new conditions? No immediate decision was demanded, for he was pressed to go off for the paper to the Washington Naval Conference, which was opening just as the transition in the *Westminster* office was taking

place, let the new experiment be launched in his absence, and on his return decide whether to take command or not. Spender readily agreed to that, but his mind must have been virtually made up before he stepped on the *Aquitania* at Southampton. If he had ever seriously thought of remaining editor he could never have been content to leave the new paper—for a new paper it virtually was—in other hands for its vital first three months. Nor was there anything to encourage him in the reports that reached him in America. Clifford Sharp, then editor of the *New Statesman*, who had been engaged as leader-writer, sent a long letter beginning:

> "From what I felt myself I can imagine something of what you felt when you saw the first number of the new *Westminster*. But perhaps you were better prepared than I was, for what was going to happen. Le Bas* said that he had collected the first number of every newspaper that had come out in the last thirty years, and that this was quite easily the worst he had ever seen. This was the general verdict. The thing seemed to me an outrage—the *Westminster* transformed into a third-rate provincial sheet and offered at 2d."

Whether Spender took quite so depressing a view of the new journal when he got back is not recorded; the paper may have improved a little by then; but he was clear about declining the editorship. Instead he undertook to write three signed articles on current affairs a week. That arrangement continued through the six years of the paper's existence, and from Spender's point of view it worked satisfactorily. "For the five [*sic*] years of the separate existence of the morning *Westminster*," he wrote in his *Life of Lord Cowdray*, "I remained a constant contributor, and always on the most amicable footing with editor, directors and staff."

Early in 1928 the morning *Westminster* ceased publication, being amalgamated with, or absorbed by, the *Daily News and Leader*. And now began a period which included the unhappiest—it would probably be true to say the only unhappy—phase of Spender's journalistic career. It is a phase over which there is little temptation to linger, but in anything purporting to be serious biography a situation cannot be glossed over or ignored simply because it is distasteful. In writing of Spender's association with the *Daily News*, and later with the *News Chronicle*, it is no part of my duty to pass judgements; I shall mention names as little as possible; and

*The late Sir Hedley Le Bas, Governing Director of the Caxton Press.

in the main I shall leave the story to be told in the form of extracts from Spender's letters.

When the *Westminster* ended Spender was one of the assets, and obviously the most valuable asset, taken over by the *Daily News*. He was engaged as a member of the staff of what now became for a short time (till the absorption of the *Daily Chronicle* in 1930) the *Daily News and Westminster*, to "act in an advisory capacity on matters relating to political editorial policy, attending the editorial conference generally say twice a week, or on other occasions by special arrangement". As to writing, he was to contribute "as required, say, an average of two articles a week, or three if occasion arises. . . . There is no stipulation that the articles must always be accepted, or that they cannot be altered in any way. At the same time it is expected that the Editor will, whenever possible, consult you before rejecting or making any material alteration in an article". The agreement, of which the clauses quoted form the material part, was to run as from 1st February 1928 and to be subject to twelve months' notice on either side.

These terms Spender readily accepted, and for a time—while Stuart Hodgson was Editor—the arrangement worked smoothly. The *News and Westminster* had secured for a moderate figure the foremost Liberal journalist of his day, and Spender had secured a platform in what was soon to be the only London Liberal morning paper. Members of the Cowdray family, who were the chief proprietors of the *Westminster*, had seats on the board of the amalgamated paper, and on their unfailing support in case of need Spender could invariably rely. It was not till 1932 that difficulties arose, though there had been one unpleasant personal incident as early as 1929. In the former year (1932) Spender complained of his articles being reduced both in number and length, but he made the best of it and went on writing as usual. Early in 1934 he wrote:

> "This week no line of my writing has appeared. The one article to which the Editor rather reluctantly agreed has been held over, and two suggestions I made for the second article I was engaged to write have been rejected. For me to continue to send articles or make suggestions would only be to court rebuffs,"

and in the course of a longer statement of about the same time he says:

"The general understanding was that I should write on Home and Foreign affairs on two days in the week, carrying on as far as possible the traditions of the *Westminster Gazette*. I was to choose my own subjects and have days assigned to me on which the reader might expect my articles. Within reason I was to have liberty to differ from the editorial line, and the editor to express his dissent from my views.

The agreement was fairly carried out for the first four years, but in the last two years it has been gradually disregarded, and now counts for little or nothing. If I suggest a subject touching any immediate question of politics I am generally told that it is being covered in other ways; I have no days assigned to me, and even when I have written an article by agreement it is liable to be displaced to make room for another article ordered for the same place on the same day. My article then goes into the waste-paper basket without any of the explanation or reference to me provided for in clause 3 of the agreement".

Nothing would be gained by pursuing in detail the lengthy discussions carried on over a period of months between Sir Walter Layton for the *News Chronicle*, Spender himself and Mr. Clive Pearson and Lady Denman (son and daughter of the first Lord Cowdray) representing the *Westminster Gazette* interest. The situation that had arisen could no doubt be explained in part. For Spender it could be contended that when the *Daily News* made its arrangement with him in 1928 it did so with its eyes open. He had been writing for all the world to read for over forty years; if any journalist's political and general outlook was universally understood it was his. His distrust of Mr. Lloyd George as a politician (for this was one of the issues that arose) had never been concealed. And it was precisely the Liberal Spender of the old *Westminster* who was being engaged to advise the *Daily News* on political matters, and to write two, and sometimes three, political articles a week; there was never any doubt or question about that. Nor could it be suggested for a moment that the quality of his writing was depreciating with age; his articles in the *Sunday Times*, eight years later than when the difficulties now under discussion began, are on record to dispel that suggestion decisively.

But the *News Chronicle*, as it had now become, of 1934 was not identical with the *Daily News* of 1928. There had been personal changes in positions of importance in the office and they had brought with them a perceptible movement to the Left. So at

least Spender thought, and he could adduce substantial grounds for his belief. He may, as a life-long Liberal, have exaggerated the tendency, but he viewed it with grave misgiving, and he was intellectually and morally incapable of giving countenance in his articles to doctrines in which he profoundly disbelieved. But he had been engaged to express his individual views over his own signature, and all he asked was to be allowed to do that, or to be told frankly that the arrangement would not work and be given his twelve months' notice. But neither course was taken. In 1934 there was some hope that Lord Lothian, who had been a director of the *Daily Chronicle*, would join the Board as a nominee of the Cowdray interest. He took the line (according to one of Spender's letters) that "if the question of policy could be settled in such a way as to give our view a guaranteed footing he would be willing to serve, but short of this he thinks he would be as helpless as I am on the staff". Nothing in the end came of this.

So, unhappily and unsatisfactorily, matters drifted on till the beginning of 1935, when it was proposed that Spender, who had been engaged to write "two articles a week, or three as occasion arises" should for the future write twelve leader-page, i.e. political, articles a year, filling up with various contributions on foreign countries, "to appear in the off season in the news columns", together with reviews and other occasional articles. Spender, meanwhile, who, while he needed a regular income, was even more concerned to find a vehicle for the expression of the views he believed in, had already raised with his most loyal of friends, Clive Pearson, the question of his writing in the chain of provincial papers owned by the Westminster Press Ltd., in which the chief interest was held by the Pearson family. In February 1935 Spender's contract with the *News Chronicle* was terminated by mutual consent; before the end of the month he had concluded an arrangement with the Westminster Press. So ended what in its closing phases—it is fair to remember that for four years things ran smoothly—an association which it is an understatement to call unhappy: Spender himself, in one of his last letters on the subject, spoke of it with some hyperbole, as "one of the strangest incidents in the history of journalism". It is possible that he was not as adaptable as he might have been, though there is nothing in the extant correspondence that suggests that. It must be recognised that a popular paper like the *News Chronicle* was something substantially different from the journal in which Spender had shaped his style; but it was his views, not his presentation of them, that had caused

the trouble in Bouverie Street. Perhaps he should have resigned his position earlier, but at every discussion of the situation he was told that he was greatly valued and the hope was expressed that adjustments would be made; he was fully justified in expecting that the agreement entered into in 1928 would be carried out in the spirit in which it was framed. But a break was inevitable, and it came in the circumstances I have indicated. I have, I believe, described the situation accurately and fairly—not on Spender's evidence only, for I have had the relevant letters from both sides before me. But pure objectivity is difficult to attain, and if lives of any of the other parties involved are ever written it is conceivable that their authors may put the case differently.

Spender's first article for the Westminster Press papers appeared on March 9th 1935. On June 16th 1942 he dictated a letter to the London Editor of the group saying that the doctors had forbidden him to write any more for dailies; five days later he died. Throughout the seven years, except for breaks for holidays and occasional illness, he fulfilled his commitments punctually and *con amore*. The morning and evening papers controlled by the Westminster Press form a considerable group, scattered widely over the country in such centres as Darlington, Leicester, Nottingham, Oxford, Bradford, Swindon and Birmingham. Their aggregate circulation is large, and a writer whose articles appear regularly in all or most of them commands a wide public. Spender realised that, and was well satisfied. "They are all very kind and welcoming at Newspaper House [the Westminster Press headquarters]" he wrote to Clive Pearson in March 1935, "and looking at your papers—nice, lively but decent and serious papers—I feel I shall be much nearer my old *Westminster* audience than in Bouverie Street." His contract ran in the first instance for two years from March 1935, but it was renewed in 1937, 1939 and 1941, and was ended only by his death in 1942. His last article was published on June 11th 1942, ten days before he died. In acknowledging the first renewal of the contract, in 1937, Spender wrote—again to Clive Pearson:

> "The touch with affairs which these newspapers give me enables me to feel younger than I know myself to be, and they are all so kind and friendly that it is always a pleasure to work with them. Your group of newspapers seem to me extraordinarily well conducted, and in many ways an example to the London papers. I was lecturing in Oxford a few weeks ago,

and found that through the *Oxford Mail* I had a considerable number of the graduate and undergraduate readers that I used to have in the days of the old *Westminster*. To write for Oxford, with the Durham miners who read the *Northern Echo* in mind, is something to keep one thinking."

To Mr. W. R. Derwent, the Managing Director, he wrote at the same time that the evidence he was given that his work was appreciated was "great good fortune for a writer in the evening of his days".

In all business relationships some friction must occasionally arise, and in the course of 1940 a rather sharp difference developed between Spender and certain of his Westminster Press colleagues who held strong anti-Chamberlain opinions. Spender had always been convinced that, the state of British and French armaments being what it was, Chamberlain in 1938 had no alternative but to play for time. That was the considered policy of the Directors of the Westminster Press, so that Spender could count on their full support. The trouble gradually blew over, and Spender remained completely satisfied with his work and the opportunities it gave him. In October 1941, after a temporary reduction in his salary, as part of a general policy of war-time retrenchment, had been revoked, he wrote to Clive Pearson acknowledging the restoration to the original figure and adding: "That this should come to an employee who is all but 79 years of age is, I should think, a rather rare incident in the history of business".

Spender took his work for the Westminster Press seriously. In the last year or two of his life, when writing—though he constantly spoke of it as an anodyne—had often to be suspended during bouts of racking pain, it was always his pride that he got through his articles for "his provincials" somehow. In a letter, dated May Day 1942, to A. G. Gardiner he wrote:

> "Being seriously ill is not the same thing as coming to an end, and I have no intention of fading out before I need. Some three weeks ago I felt obliged to ask for leave of absence, and for the present my articles are suspended. But till then I had never failed to deliver the various sorts of goods I had undertaken to deliver to newspapers, Ministries etc. Whether I shall ever get back to it I don't know. What I felt most at the end was the strain of following events from day to day—the beginner's panic returning at the end."

That was some seven weeks before his death. He did get back to it, and was writing till less than a fortnight before he died.

Meanwhile he had received an invitation which gave him much pleasure. Some time in 1939, when Herbert Sidebotham, who under the pseudonym "Scrutator" had for some years been writing a notable weekly article on current events on the leader page of the *Sunday Times*, fell ill, Spender was asked whether, in the event of Sidebotham being unable to resume, he would be willing to fill the vacant place. Rather surprisingly, in view of all the years he had been writing signed articles for the morning *Westminster* and the *News Chronicle*, he said he could not undertake a continuous series of signed articles. He emphasised that to me, among others, at the time, and there was no doubt about the finality of his decision. It arose from the importance he attached to such a position on such a page of such a paper, and he was convinced that about half a dozen articles were as many as ought to appear over one signature consecutively. His contributions, therefore, were intermittent. Sidebotham never recovered, and in the spring of 1940 he died. The invitation to Spender to become definitely "Scrutator," at any rate for a time (it could, in the course of Nature, be no long time) was renewed in a more definite form, but declined. But he continued to write frequently, and though he set himself an even sterner limitation than six consecutive articles he was clearly constrained to break his vows, as a passage in a letter of August 1940 indicates: "I am lucky if I get a day in which my chronic trouble does not suddenly become acute, and then I have to sit tight just to get through what I have undertaken to deliver. I tell Hadley* of the *Sunday Times* I will never do more than three consecutive signed articles, and leave it to him to say whether I shall resume after that. But he begs me to go on, and I start again, as soon as I have done with my provincials, and not seldom have to tear up and write again, so that this Sunday performance shall not be too belated. Yet in a curious way writing—just sitting to it —is an anodyne."

His *Sunday Times* work, without in any way encroaching on his other commitments, assumed the largest place in Spender's life in these closing years. He felt it was almost like being back on the old *Westminster*, for the *Sunday Times* had both a large and an influential circulation, and its principal articles were extensively quoted abroad. Spender was free to write precisely what he chose (a subject was sometimes suggested to him, but his treatment of it

*Mr. W. W. Hadley, Editor of the *Sunday Times* since 1932.

was his own) and the expressions of appreciation which reached him, not only from the editor but from readers of proved discernment (Lord Baldwin, Lord Justice Eldon Bankes and Mr. Lionel Curtis all wrote about one particular article, that of September 3rd 1939), satisfied him that he was reaching an audience worth reaching, and above all that his fears lest at seventy-eight his hand might be losing its old cunning had no basis. But the *Sunday Times* work came to an end in the middle of 1941. One reason, in Spender's belief, was that the office fell much under the influence of Lord Vansittart's views, which in various respects differed too widely from Spender's for articles by Spender to fit harmoniously into the temporarily prevailing scheme of things. Another, and perhaps a better, reason was that the paper felt the need of appointing a regular "Scrutator." Spender, as has been seen, felt unable to accept the position himself, but he had the satisfaction of seeing the appointment go to an able writer whom he had himself recommended.

But other tasks abounded. "Between my provincials, foreign broadcasts,* memoranda for the Ministry [of Information] etc.," he wrote to Herbert Worsley in February 1941, "I am full of work, and now and again *The Times* will take an article from me, as they did a fortnight ago. It was telegraphed the same day in translation to every French-speaking country and colony, and now I am pondering whether I can do another addressed to Germany." And through all these years, down to the last month of his life, he was writing books. If he did not actually die pen in hand it was so near to that as almost to justify the expression.

On this closing phase, the last page of the last chapter, there is little temptation to dwell. After returning from a holiday abroad in 1939 Spender became unwell, and on his doctor's advice saw a specialist. The verdict was, in effect, a sentence of death, though he was not told that. Partly to ease housekeeping problems as domestic help became scarcer the house at Farnborough was given up, and Mr. and Mrs. Spender installed themselves at the Crest Hotel, at Crowborough, in Sussex, in July 1940. There for a year Spender worked and suffered, moving afterwards for some months into quarters in a private house in Crowborough. His letters to different friends at this time tell the same story—work, bombs, pain, more work as anodyne, Mrs. Spender's devoted and ceaseless

*Spender was not well enough to deliver these broadcasts himself. He prepared scripts, which were translated into the required languages and read by B.B.C. announcers.

care of him—in almost identically the same words. What he wrote on 14th September 1940 to Vivian Phillipps will stand for what he wrote repeatedly to others:

"We have come here [Crowborough]—probably for the winter—and have lent our house to some lady teachers, who report that they are well satisfied with its basement shelter. Bombs and sirens are much the same here as there. Last night two incendiary bombs were dropped in the garden of this hotel and an H.E. on Crowborough golf-course. Planes coming from the coast to London are first tackled just overhead, and later again when they are going back. We have come to ignore sirens, and don't move from our beds unless the guns shake us out of them; then we take cover in the adjoining passage, which is proof against breaking glass. On these terms we have pretty good nights and are not much troubled by day. My main object in coming down here was to be where there is a lift, and that my wife, who has a weak heart, should not have to go down (and up) two flights of stairs when there is a sudden need of going to shelter. The doctor was peremptory about that. If my work did not require me to be near London I should probably have moved farther out of range, but she won't go without me.

"We can neither of us pretend to be at our best. I have an internal weak spot which, though not dangerous, brings on severe pains if I move about more than a little. I find the best anodyne is just to sit tight and go on working, but between the noises overhead and the pains within me it is sometimes rather an effort, and I wonder what the result on the thing written may be. I have a telephone on my table, and when communications fail, as they did last week, I can dictate my articles into a dictaphone at the London end. In this way I keep touch with my provincial syndicate, or the M.o.I. if it wants an article".

In December 1941 came a move to a hotel at Tunbridge Wells. It was only meant to be a short visit, "for a change of scene and company" as Spender put it, but while there he became seriously ill, and the doctor insisted on his remaining where he was. He did remain for nearly four months, till April 1942. Then came the last move of all. He described it in anticipation in a letter to Herbert Worsley on 23rd March.

"My wife has told you about our flat at Bromley. The moment the doctor said he thought I should be well enough to be moved she set about it, and has been splendid in rushing everything through, and clearing all obstacles. I have not seen it and it is not palatial, but it is enough for me that it satisfies her, for she is very exacting. Everything is new and spick and span and the fittings most modern. But the great thing is that it ought to be well within our means, putting them at the lowest, and that will be immense relief to me. Then for the first time for two years I shall have a room to sit in and write in. So my spirits rise in spite of the enemy, whose attacks are severe, though fortunately with intervals which enable me to do my work and make my senile contribution to the world-wide struggle."

The reference to "within our means" needs a word of comment. It reflects the financial anxiety which had weighed on Spender, not for himself but lest Mrs. Spender should be left inadequately provided for after his death. Actually his concern had no foundation, and he realised that in time to dismiss it from his mind before he died. His time at the Bromley flat—which, however modest, was a home once more—was brief, but it was to his days there that the experience of faith and complete confidence described earlier in this book* belonged. He still wrote for his provincial papers; he still wrote letters to his friends. One desire, that he might live till July to keep his golden wedding possessed him. But its satisfaction was denied. On June 21st, six months short of his eightieth birthday, he died. The last chapter of the book that began with his beginning was closed.

*p. 73.

APPENDIX

To appreciate the force of Spender's style as a leader-writer adequately—and it was as writer of leaders in the *Westminster* that he revealed his powers at their highest—it would be necessary to study not one but forty or fifty of his articles, selecting examples of his effectiveness both in attack and in defence, in criticism and in appreciation, in exposition and, on occasion, in the mere destructive mobilisation of unassailable facts and figures. Space obviously precludes the assemblage of such material here. It must suffice to provide two examples of Spender's work, separated in date by over forty years, but each visited with a spontaneous encomium by an ex-Prime Minister.

In February 1899, a few months after Kitchener's brilliant victory at Omdurman had brought the whole of the Sudan under British rule, the anti-Imperialist wing of the Liberal Opposition in the House of Commons saw fit to bring forward a motion condemning the whole policy responsible for the campaign and the annexation. Of the leader Spender produced on that in the *Westminster* of 25th February Lord Rosebery wrote (in a letter already quoted):

> "I rarely touch on your articles, or venture to criticise or commend them. But I must be allowed to make an exception and express my strong sense of the excellence—I might almost say perfection—of that of to-day."

It is tempting to analyse the particular excellences of this leader (which is interesting incidentally as ranging Spender, in this instance at least, with the Imperialist rather than the "Little England" section of Liberals), but it must be enough to point to the ordered development of the argument, the firm but respectful criticism of the leader of the party, the preference for reason over vituperation, the salutary incorporation of one or two hard facts like the figures of the population of Egypt and the Sudan, the candid recognition of the responsibility of a Liberal Government for the failure to get relief to Gordon in 1885, the culmination in a single sentence defining a progressive and constructive policy.

A BAD NIGHT

THE best friend of the Opposition can only say that yesterday was a bad night for them in the House of Commons. How bad is shown better by the division list than by any more elaborate explanation. There are 185 Liberal members even in the present House. Of these 44 followed their leader into the lobby, 13, including four ex-Ministers, voted with the Government, and the rest were absent paired or unpaired. These figures speak for themselves, and if they were the last word on the subject we should have to conclude that on one most important branch of foreign policy there was no leadership which commanded more than a fraction of the party. We make no complaint of Mr. Morley's speech. It was, on its own lines, a good and moderate speech, in strict accordance with the view he has always taken. By dissociating himself from formal responsibility for leadership he has left himself free to divide the House upon this or any other issue. But we are frankly mystified, after reading Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's speech, that he should have concluded by giving official support to Mr. Morley's motion. For that means, if it means anything, that the Liberal Party passes a vote of censure on the policy of the Sudan expedition—that, in Mr. Morley's words, "the policy of the Sudan advance has been an error from the first", and that after the stricken field, and the capture of Omdurman, it is necessary to make a continued protest against organising and reclaiming the recovered territory.

Those who are not of this opinion are compelled by last night's proceedings to register their dissent, even at the risk of making fresh cross-currents. There was not, in our view, the smallest necessity for any Liberal to vote at all in last night's division, unless indeed he holds Mr. Morley's doctrine. For what has taken place and what will take place in the Sudan the responsibility rests primarily with the Government. We do not yet see the end, and we may very pertinently ask certain of the questions which Mr. Morley put in regard both to the future and to the conduct of the campaign. What, for example, do the Government mean when they assert the right of conquest, on what principle are they going to fix the boundaries, what negotiations are proceeding with France or other Powers? When we see the conclusion of some of these matters, there may be certain indictments which can fairly be brought against the Government with the consent of all sections of the party. The opportunity, however, for these is not yet. At the present moment we can only ask what has happened since last September that anyone who approved of the advance to Khartoum, who declared the result to be a gain to civilisation, who joined in the rejoicings at the success of the army—should turn on himself and pass censure on these operations? Is it that some wise men descry signs of reaction against

Imperialism in the country, or that the inevitable Budget casts its shadow before it? These are not motives which statesmen can frankly avow. If the country should swing from the exaggeration of one view to the exaggeration of its opposite it will be their business to hold the more firmly the doctrine which they conceive to be sound and true.

Let us look back for a moment over the history of this Sudan affair. Three years ago the Opposition protested against an expedition which, as explained by the Government, was starting for no particular goal and for no defined object. Many of us, while making that protest, expressly declared that if the Government would say frankly that their intention was to recover the Sudan we should not oppose them. The Liberal Party, as it seemed to us, had a responsibility for the fate of that region which expressly deterred it from opposing an effort to undo the past. What has happened since? The Government have advanced into the Sudan; the operation has proved easier and speedier than most of us expected. There is not in the whole country anyone who counsels a retreat. But, say Mr. Morley and Mr. Courtney, it is a big, serious and in some ways unprecedented task that you are undertaking. No doubt it is, and it must be taken seriously and conscientiously, but do not let us exaggerate it. While Egypt has gone up in population from seven millions to ten millions under our rule, the Sudan under Mahdi and Khalifa has declined from sixteen millions to four millions. That, in itself, is a deplorable fact which should lie not a little on our conscience, but on the other side the shrinkage of population makes the immediate task less formidable. In any case it was a task which sooner or later was inevitable, unless we were prepared to withdraw from Egypt. So long as we are responsible for the well-being of Egypt we cannot contemplate the idea of the Nile Valley becoming derelict or falling into the hands of other Powers without the most serious misgiving. It is arguable that we are wrong to be in Egypt at all, but it is scarcely arguable that, being in Egypt, we could fold our hands and be indifferent to what is happening in the valley of the Upper Nile. Now, putting all these things together, we ask, is the Liberal Party, or any section of it, going to commit itself, at this time of day, to an agitation for the evacuation of Egypt? We think not; the thing is too hopelessly *chose jugée* for practical politicians. But if not, is it good sense or good politics for Liberals to set themselves against the inevitable consequences of being in Egypt, and to criticise after the event and in the House of Commons that which they have been a party to in the country during the recess? Surely the right course instead is to fix our eyes on the present and future, and to labour strenuously to make the administration of the new territory wise, just and humane.

That was written in 1899, when Spender was thirty-six. Forty years later, when he was seventy-six, an article he wrote in the

Sunday Times on September 3rd 1939, the day war with Germany was declared,* evoked the admiration of another ex-Prime Minister, and Lord Baldwin of Bewdley wrote:

> "I thank you from my heart for your article in the *Sunday Times*. The paragraph headed 'Attack on the Foundations' is profoundly true, and my recognition of that truth has been the key to my speeches during the last seventeen years. What work there will be when this tyranny is overpast, and how I wish I were ten years younger!"

THE MORAL ISSUES

THE method of aggression is always the same—the atrocity campaign, the ultimatum, the assertion that it has been rejected before there has been time to read it, the bombing, the troops on the march. Serbia in 1914, Austria in 1937, Czechoslovakia in 1938, Poland in 1939 are all instances of the classic German way of picking a quarrel. The outside world has never been in a doubt about it, and least of all at this moment. Germany brands herself as the aggressor, and, since Italy is taking no initiative, she stands alone, except in so far as she may have the promise of secret support from Russia. British and French action is pre-determined in such a situation, and there is not the slightest doubt about it.

Herr Hitler has told us more than once that he was losing his patience. Apparently it does not occur to him to consider how much patience has been needed by the rest of the world to live on any terms with him during the last two years. During this period no Government has been able to plan for its own country, no parent for the education of his children, no individual to enter into a contract running even six months ahead, no architect or builder to start on any considerable undertaking, no author to begin on a book, without being haunted by the thought that all these efforts may be wasted by some crisis which the German Dictator might spring on his neighbours. During much of this time we have been reduced to hanging on his speeches, making mentally the pilgrimages between Berlin, Berchtesgaden, and Nuremberg imposed on his faithful followers, and wondering what unpleasant and explosive next move he may have in store for us.

RESULTS OF ABSOLUTISM

When he came to power we tried to think that the adoption of absolutism by one nation was a matter of concern only to itself. If

*Spender, of course, had to write 24 hours—probably longer—before the actual declaration.

Germans chose to strip themselves of all the guarantees against tyranny and misgovernment, all the correctives to human infirmity and failure of judgment which other nations had evolved through centuries of experience—that, we said, was their own affair. We have learned since that they were exposing their neighbours to the same hazards as they were accepting for themselves. We, too, have had to wait on the will or whim of the inscrutable, infallible dictator whose special pleasure it has been to keep both his own people and his neighbours in a perpetual suspense.

We have needed much restraint while we prepared ourselves to meet him on equal terms. But we have never doubted what our duty would and must be when this time came. It is to lead the world back to orderly life in which men and women can go about their lawful occupations without this overhanging anxiety, in which grievances may be remedied and quarrels composed in an atmosphere of peace, in which pleasure of living may not be clouded by fear.

We need not use big words about it. Many of us have in our minds the memory of the old Europe in which we passed from country to country without passport or *visa*, sure of a welcome everywhere, making a possession of our own of each beautiful scene, lake, mountain, forest, ancient city, noble building. We felt them as belonging to us all, binding us together in the common heritage of what we regarded as European civilisation. A nostalgia for this vanished world is deep in the thoughts of millions in all countries to-day.

"I see the lamps going out all over Europe and they will not be lit again in our lifetime." So said Lord Grey in the last hours before the war of 1914. It was a sadly prophetic saying, which may set us thinking about our failure to relight the lamps in the subsequent years. There is a political and a spiritual—an outer and an inner—history of these years, and the two are closely intertwined. The political is better left alone at the moment, but there is something to say about the inner and perhaps even more significant part of the story.

ATTACK ON THE FOUNDATIONS

In the last twenty years an attack has been made on the moral and religious foundations which is without parallel since the last quarter of the eighteenth century. A flood of literature has descended on us questioning all the traditional values and even suggesting that humanity and civilisation are lost causes.

When Burke visited Paris in 1773 he found there a brilliant crowd of intellectual doctrinaires who seemed to him to be talking away the foundations of society and religion without preparing anything to put in their place. Watching them, he broke out in wrath against the "petulant, assuming, short-sighted coxcombs of philosophy who imagine that they have discovered the secrets of the standing and falling of States"

A very different man, Rousseau, who is supposed to have been the father of revolutionary theory, was of the same opinion. "These vain and futile declaimers," he wrote (also after a visit to Paris), "go forth on all sides armed with their fatal paradoxes to sap the foundations of our faith and nullify virtue. They smile contemptuously at such old names as patriotism and religion and consecrate their talents to the destruction and defamation of all that men hold sacred." If Rousseau was on fire at the iniquities of government, as he saw them, he was also a firm believer in the capacity of mankind to rebuild on the ancient foundations. No one was less of a fatalist.

THE CULT OF VIOLENCE

The world to-day again reflects the seethe of incoherent ideas. An acute observer who visited Moscow, Rome and Berlin some eighteen months ago came back saying that in all of them the dictators were being carried on the shoulders of two million fanatical young men who had been taught by their elders that the good life consisted in the practice of violence by a self-appointed minority and complete submission to it by the immense majority. The differences between the ideologies, Communist, Nazi, Fascist, were as nothing compared with their identity in this respect. Between them Marxist and Fascist, left-wing and right-wing, had concentrated the thoughts of immense numbers on violent as opposed to rational solutions of either internal or external problems. The Marxist preaching class-war for the one, the Fascist international war for the other, left no room for the life of peace. When men were not fighting one another in the class-war they would be fighting their neighbours in the wars of nations.

In this atmosphere all Christian and liberal thoughts necessarily withered away. Young Communist and young Nazi were taught that liberty is a delusion, that individuals have no rights, that government is the secret of a few experts, among whom the leader is infallible, that religion is either a groundless superstition or a State convenience, that nations are a law unto themselves, that the good citizen should devote himself to amassing power to enable him to trample on his neighbours. Everything that had been taught by sages and prophets since the world began was swept into limbo.

We have looked on with a sense of incredulity. It has seemed like a nightmare from which we must awake. What we have now to realise is that we are faced with a view of life which is held fanatically, even devoutly, by immense numbers, and that if we are to resist it successfully, whether in peace or in war, it must be with a faith which is as firm and strong in our own cause. Despair of human nature, belief that man has run his course, and that civilisation is doomed, are at this moment a kind of moral defeatism, which, if we yielded to it, would proclaim our battle half lost before it was begun.

I remember hearing Asquith say when someone spoke to him about

the destruction of the British Empire: "Believe me, there is a great deal of destruction in the British Empire." So we may say with the greatest confidence of civilisation. Whatever comes to pass, man's unconquerable mind on which civilisation is built is not going to be extinguished. If gloomy thoughts are encouraged by the recent phase in which the weapons of destruction seem to have passed out of rational control, we have the signs everywhere about us that the means of correction and construction have been gathering force.

NOT A LOST CAUSE

If the last war had taken place in the eighteenth century, it would have left Europe scarred, ravaged, and impoverished for generations; within ten years in this century the reconstruction was all but complete. Terrible as was the slaughter and suffering, population has rushed in to fill the gap and heal the wounds. In the same years in our own country, we have seen a great advance in the health and prosperity of the mass of people. Physical fitness, as we discovered in recruiting for the militia, has reached a standard far in advance of that of 1914. Education and the social services have gone forward; never has humanitarianism made a stronger appeal. During all this time the creative forces have been fighting an even battle with the destructive. We have now to see that they prevail.

Let us put aside all unnerving thoughts which suggest that we are fighting in a lost or failing cause—that civilisation is doomed, that thinking man has been tried and found wanting, that we are living in a world from which God has withdrawn. At the end of all our questionings lies the world of faith, where our foundations must be laid, if it is only faith in the essential decencies to which history bears witness.

This time we have no need to define our war-aims. They are all summed up in the supreme one of creating an international order in which men and women may pursue the life of peace without fear. Let us hold to that, and firmly resolve that it shall not be perverted by any of the trials and afflictions that await us.

INDEX

A

Abyssinia, 168-9
Acland, Arthur, 20-1, 27; at Balliol, 9, 13; on Spender's leaving the *Westminster* 32-3; and formation of 1905 Ministry, 74-5
Adly Pasha Yeghen, 192, 195-6
Agadir crisis, 37, 156-7, 159
Alexandria, 195
Ali Maher Pasha, 196
Allen, Henry J., 211
Allen, Sir Thomas, 198
Allenby, Lord, 192, 197
Ambassadors, Conference of, 157
America of To-Day, The, 173, 181-2, 210
Anglo-French Entente, 36-7, 120, 147-9
Ankara, 205
Anson, Sir William, 189
Armaments, Royal Commission on, 49, 170, 187, 198-200, 218
Arnold, Matthew, 6
Asquith, H. H., *See* Oxford and Asquith, Lord
Asquith, Sir Cyril, 173-4; on *Fifty Years of Europe*, 183
Astor, W. W., buys *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23
Athenæum Club, 65-6
Austria, annexes Bosnia-Herzegovina, 153-4; British attitude towards, 155; sends ultimatum to Servia, 158; annexation of, 169

B

Bacon, Admiral Sir Reginald, 123-4
Baldwin, Lord, 65-6, 227, 233
Balfour, Arthur, 109; resignation of, 74; First Lord of Admiralty, 76, 135, 163; on complication of government, 184; at Washington Conference, 209
Balfour, Jabez, 25-6
Balfour, Lady Frances, 188
Ballard, Captain, 131-2
Balliol College, Oxford, Master of, 4-5; Spender at, 4-10; political clubs at, 9
Bankes, Sir John Eldon, 198, 227
Bardsley, R. V., 207
Baring, Maurice, 60
Barnett, Canon Samuel, in Oxford, 9; at Toynbee Hall, 13, 18-19
Bath, 1-4, 66
Bath, Marquess of, 5*n*
Bath College, 3-4
Battenberg, Prince Louis of, popular clamour against, 122; First Sea Lord, 130-2, 160
Belgium, invasion of, 158
Bell, Hugh, 63
Bell, Moberley, 138
Belloc, Hilaire, 60
Benckendorff, Count, 148
Benckendorff, Countess, 60
Bennett, Arnold, 60, 62-3
Benson, Godfrey, 6
Beresford, Lord Charles, 84, 126-7
Berlin, 150-1
Bermuda, 55, 212
Bethell, Admiral, 131
Bethmann-Hollweg, Dr. Von, 159
Between Two Wars, 68-70, 173, 186-7
Bieberstein, Marischall von, 133
Birchall Citizenship Prize, 183-4
Blatchford, Robert, 126
Boas, Dr. F. S., 3, 9
Boer War, 36, 93; Campbell-Bannerman on, 107; outbreak of, 145-6; splits Liberal Party, 146
Bonham-Carter, Lady Violet, 171
Bosnia-Herzegovina, 153-4
Botha, General, 146
Boulogne, Spender clears, 162
Bourgeois, Léon, 164
Bowen, W. E., 10
Bracken, Brendan, 83
Bremen, 150
Briand, Aristide, 167

Bridgman, Sir Francis, 160
British Documents on the Origins of the War, 145
Brodie-Hall, Miss, 138
Bromley, 54, 229
Browning, Robert, 6
Brunner, Sir John, 28
Bryan, William Jennings, 209
Bryce, Viscount, 31, 85; and peace demonstration, 37-8; his correspondence with Spender, 93
Buchan, John (Lord Tweedsmuir), 172
Buckmaster, Lord, 62
Bülow, Prince von, 152
Burke, Edmund, 234
Burney, Admiral, 131
Burnham, Lord, 6, 45*n*.
Burns, John, 25; resignation of, 37
Butler, Murray, 63

C

Cairo, Milner Mission in, 193, 195; Museum in, 206
Callaghan, Sir George, 131
Cambon, Paul, 148
Campbell-Bannerman, Sir Henry, 88, 139; Cabinet of (1905), 74-6, 82; and South African settlement, 86-7; the mind of, *vide* Bryce, 93; dissension between Rosebery and, 107-14; on Boer War, 107, 146*n*.; Stirling speech of, 113-14; Spender's biography of, 173-4; condemns annexation of Sudan, 231
Canada, 210; Liberal Party in, 177-8
Carter, Howard, 206
Casablanca, 212
Cassel, Sir Ernest, 132
Cecil, Lord Hugh, 93
Cecil, Lord Robert, 83
Chamberlain, Joseph, 7, 11; Tariff Reform campaign of, 36; Imperial Preference campaign of, 109-11
Chamberlain, Neville, Spender supports, 169-71, 187, 225
Chamberlain, Sir Austen, 7, 93, 166-7; on Report of Milner Mission, 197*n*.
Changing East, The, 173, 181, 203
Channel Tunnel, Lord Fisher on, 134
Charnwood, Lord, 6
Chelsfield, 54
Chesterton, G. K., 60
Churchill, Winston, and Fisher, 76, 84, 122, 130-5; correspondence of, with Spender, 79-85; Under-Secretary of Colonial Office, 82; and naval estimates, 82, 95-6, 117; at Sidney Street, 84; Russian policy of, 85; and Transvaal constitution, 87; in submarine, 123; First Lord of Admiralty, 130; at outbreak of war, 159; upsets Egyptians, 197; in Sudan, 206
Citrine, Sir Walter, 83
Clemenceau, Georges, 115, 120-1, 164
Cobham, Kent, 53
Coghlan, Edward, 10
Collings, Jesse, 11
Colvin, Ian, 39
Comments of Bagshot, The, 172
Committee of Imperial Defence, 117, 131, 134
Conscription, Fisher on 134; Spender's attitude towards, 156, 161
Constantinople, 104, 205
Contemporary Review, 106
Cook, E. T., 9; editor of *Pall Mall*, 20, 22-3; editor of *Westminster*, 23-4, 26-7, 145; editor of *Daily News*, 27
Cooper, Duff, 83
Cowdray, Lord, 28-30, 210; *The Westminster* of, 140, 219-20; Spender's *Life* of, 173, 175-6; constructs Sennar Dam, 207
Cox, Harold, 16
Craven, Sir Charles, 198
Crewe, Lord, 85; at dinners to Spender, 63-5; on *The Public Life*, 179
Cromer, Lord, 93, 191-2
Crowborough, 54, 73, 227-8
Crowdy, Dame Rachel, 198
Crowe, Sir Eyre, 152
Curtis, Lionel, 227
Curzon, Lord, 156, 166; at Balliol, 5; competitor in *Saturday Westminster*, 41, 78; his correspondence with Spender, 77-8; chooses Spender for Milner Mission, 78-9, 191
Czechoslovakia, 169

D

D'Abernon, 83
Daily Chronicle, The, 22, 24, 29; Massingham leaves, 105; absorbed by *News*, 221
Daily Mail, 114, 137, 208
Daily News, The, 22, 27, 29-30; absorbs *Westminster*, 220; Spender's association with, 220-3; becomes *News Chronicle*, 221-2
Daily Telegraph, 208; publishes interview with Kaiser, 45, 153
Dardanelles, Fisher's opposition to attack on, 76, 134; Russia desires opening of, 153-4
Dardanelles Campaign, inefficiency of medical service in, 162-3
Dawson, Geoffrey, 140, 170
Death Duties, 25, 103
Delhi Durbar, 55, 201-3
Denman, Lady, 222
Derby, Lord, 76
Dibdin, Sir Lewis, 189
Dilling, 207
Disarmament Conference, Washington, 32, 38, 166-7, 177, 208-9
Divorce, Royal Commission on, 187-90
Donald, Robert, 143*n*.
"Dreadnought," the, controversy over, 95-6, 117-19, 153, 155; Fisher on, 124-5; Austrian, 127
Dueim, 207
Dunn, W. T., 3-4; congratulatory letter from, 31-2; influence of, 66

E

Earle, Lionel, 83
Eastern Morning News, 1, 2, 8*n*., 11; Spender acting-editor of, 12; Spender editor of, 14-19
Echo, The, 13, 20
Eden, Anthony, 197
Edgcumbe, Sir Robert, 36
Edward VII, King, 31*n*., 36-7; and Liberal unity, 109; and Esher, 117; and McKenna, 118-19; and Fisher, 123
Edwards, John Passmore, 13-14, 20
Egypt, Milner Mission to, 49, 78-9, 191-7; Spender's visits to 56, 181, 201, 205-8; Spender an expert on, 181; British predominance in, 147; Spender writes on, 181; a British Protectorate, 192-3; disturbances in, 191-5; Treaty of Alliance with, 197; unhappy atmosphere in, 206; and Sudan, 232
Elgin, Lord, 74, 87, 105
Elibank, Master of, 29
Eliot, T. S., poetry of, 59-60
Ellis, Tom, 27, 102
El Obeid, 55, 207
English-Speaking Union, 181, 210
Esher, Lord, 29, 116-17; and formation of 1905 Cabinet, 74, 76, 117; appeal from, 109; his correspondence with Spender, 116-22; his relations with Fisher, 116-17; and Territorial Army, 117, 156; on naval strategy, 119-20; on Great War, 120-1
Etretat, 57
Evening News, attacks Spender, 142-3
Expeditionary Force, question of transportation of, 159-60; breakdown of medical service of, 161-2

F

Fallodon, 55-6
Farnborough, Kent, 54, 227
Fashoda Incident, 36, 147
Fifty Years of Europe, 59, 144, 173, 176, 182-3; exam papers set on, 183-4
Fisher, Lord, 122; tribute from, 34; and Churchill, 76, 84, 130-5; his relations with Esher, 116-17; his correspondence with Spender, 122 *et seq*.; First Sea Lord, 122, 129, 134-5; and the "Dreadnought," 124-5; on motor battleships, 127; on America, 127-8; on English-speaking Federation, 128; retires to Italy, 129; suggests Admiralty appointments, 130-2; on Channel Tunnel, 134; Spender's last meeting with, 135-6; *Memories* of, 136
Fitzmaurice, Lord, 49, 85
Fortnightly Review, 149

"Foundations of British Policy, The," 142
Fox, H. F., 41
France, British Entente with, 36-7, 120, 147-9; and Germany, 115, 148, 156; a potential antagonist, 146-7; military conversations with, 149, 155, 157; Russian alliance of, 157; reform of medical service in, 161-2; refusal of, to disarm, 166-7, 209; H. G. Wells on, 208
Franckenstein, Sir George, 158
French, Sir John, 120
"From the Meuse to the Somme," 161
Fry, C. B., 57-8

G

Galsworthy, John, tribute from, 35
Gandhi, Mahatma, 203-4
Gardiner, A. G., 85; Spender's tribute to, 43; letters to, 48, 59, 68*n.*, 225; at Reform Club, 62-5; on Spender, 77*n.*; goes to Germany, 149*n.*; differs from Spender, 174; considers visit to India, 201-2
Gardiner, Clive, on Spender as artist, 60-1; paints Spender's portrait, 60, 64-5
Garrett, Edmund, 20
Garvin, J. L., 43; contributes to *Eastern Morning News*, 16-17
Gates, Dr. G. F., 205
Geake, Charles, 39, 142
Geddes, Sir Auckland, 209
General Strike (1926), 214
George V, King, 37, 119-20; and Delhi Durbar, 202-3
George, David Lloyd, 76, 121, and overthrow of Asquith, 38, 163, 213; and Maurice Debate, 38, 164, 213; and "rationalisation" of railways, 81; and naval estimates, 82, 95-6, 117; and Coalition, 83; Spender's letter to, on "Dreadnought", 95-6, 156; makes speech on war aims, 120-1; *Truth About the Peace Conference* of, 144; at Peace Conference, 164-5, and Egypt, 197; and Liberal Funds, 213-15; Spender's distrust of, 222
George, Henry, 9, 12, 14
Germany, provocative actions of, 37, 147, 149, 156-7; visit of Editors to, 66, 149-52; post-war plight of, 84-5; 167; and France, 115, 148, 156; British doubts concerning, 96, 119-20, 146-9, 152-3, 155; and the "Dreadnought," 124; pacific assurances of, 152; new Navy Law of, 153; stands by Austria, 154-5, 158; outbreak of war with, 157-9; infractions of Treaties by, 168-9; superior armaments of, 218; method of aggression of, 233
Gibbs, Sir Philip, 199
Gilbert, W. S., 48
Gillan, Sir Angus, 207
Gladstone, Herbert, 85, 108; and formation of 1905 Cabinet, 74-6; correspondence of, with Spender, 93-4
Gladstone, W. E., 29, 102-3; Spender's acquaintanceship with, 19, 22-3, 27, 77; resignation of, 25; opposed to Divorce Laws, 188
Globe, The, 21, 23, 28
Gorell, Lord, 188
Gorst, Sir Eldon, 192
Gosse, Sir Edmund, 156
Gould, F. C., cartoons of, 106, 136
Government of Mankind, The, 58-9, 173, 182, 184-5
Grace, W. G., 57
Great Britain, Empire and Commonwealth, 1886-1935, 173, 184-6
Great War (1914-18), 37-8, 120-1, 133-5; events leading to, 153-9; outbreak of, 159; breakdown in medical service in, 161-3
Green, T. H., 5
Greenwood, Frederick, 21-2
Grey, Lord, of Fallodon, at Balliol, 5 on Spender's journalism, 28-9; Spender's friendship with, 31, 37, 45, 85, 94, 145, 147-8; his love of nature, 55-6; as a cyclist, 57; *Twenty-Five Years* of, 57, 94, 145; refuses to accept office under Campbell-Bannerman, 74-5; becomes Foreign Secretary, 76; and Liberal

League, 108; opposed to Chamberlain, 110; and C.B.'s Stirling speech, 113; at Balmoral, 120; Kaiser's message to, 151-2; presses for Conference on annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 154-5; and Conference of Ambassadors, 157; at outbreak of war, 159, 162, 234; President of Liberal Council, 215
Grosse Politik der Europaischen Kabinette, 145, 182
Guedalla, Philip, 135
Guthrie, Lord, 188
Gutteridge, Professor H. C., 198-9
Gwynne, Dr. L. H., 207

H

Hadley, W. W., 226
Haig, Field-Marshal Earl, 161, 163
Haldane, Lord, 122; Spender's relations with, 31, 85, 94, 148; reforms the Army, 36; refuses to accept office, 74-5; becomes Secretary of State for War, 76; and Territorials, 94, 156; Fisher on, 127; mission of, to Germany, 157; on transport of Expeditionary Force, 159-60; and reform of medical service, 162; Spender's chapter on, 186
Hamburg, 150
Hamilton, Sir, Robert, 63
Hankey, Lord 133, 183
Harcourt, Lord, 25, 107, 109; relations of, with Rosebery, 102-6
Hardie, James Keir, 25
Harding, President, 166-7, 208-9
Harris, Sir Percy, 62-3
Haskell, Henry, 211
Hassanein Bey, 195
Hawkins, Anthony Hope, 6, 8, 10
Hay, John, 148
Henderson, Arthur, 166
Henry, Sir Charles, 28
Herbert, A. P., 189
Herrick, Myron, 161
Herschell, Lord, 104
Hichens, Robert, 178-9
Hitler, Adolf, 168-9, 177, 233
Hobson, J. A., 62
Hodgson, Stuart, 221
Holstein, von, 152
Home Rule Question, 25, 37, 157; Rosebery and, 105, 108, 113
House, Colonel E. M., 211
Housman, Laurence, 60
Hudson, Sir Robert, 27, 74, 85; Spender's *Life* of, 173, 175-6
Hughes, Charles Evans, 209
Hull, 1, 11-12
Hurst, Sir Cecil, 191
Huxley, T. H., 6

I

Imperial Preference, 109
Imperial Press Conference, 66, 81-2
Independent Labour Party, 25
India, Spender's visits to, 56, 91, 157, 201-4; Spender a specialist on, 64; Lord Curzon and, 77-8; Spender writes on, 181, 203-4; Stead suggests journalistic visit to, 201-2; dyarchy in, 203-4
India Council's Bill, 91
Indian Scene, The, 78, 172, 203
Inge, Dean, 68*n*., 114
In Memoriam, 88
Institute of Journalists, 44, 66
Isvolsky, M., 153-4
Italy, 129, 216; attacks Abyssinia, 168; British agreement with, 169

J

Jameson Raid, 36, 145-6
Japan, British treaty with, 69; Russia and, 153; occupies Mukden, 167-8
Jebb, R. C., 6
Jellicoe, Earl, 131-2, 134
Jerram, Admiral, 131
Jowett, Benjamin, 4-5; on journalism, 8; sermons of, 67

K

Kalisch, Alfred, 10
Keogh, Sir Alfred, 76, 162-3

Kerr, Captain Mark, 131
Khaki Election, 164-5
Khartoum, 206-7, 231
King, Mackenzie, 93; his appreciation of Spender's books, 176-8
Kitchener, Lord, 120, 134, 156; stopped from returning to Egypt, 76, 160; and reform of medical service, 162; in Egypt, 192
Knollys, Lord, 31*n.*
Knutsford, Lord, 52
Kruger, President, 146
Kühlmann, von, 148, 158

L

Labour Exchange, 81
Landor, Walter Savage, 1
Lang, Andrew, 19
Lang, Cosmo, Archbishop of Canterbury, at Balliol, 5, 7-9; on Spender, 8; member of Royal Commission on Divorce, 188-9
Lansbury, Lord, 83
Lansdowne, Lord, 91; and Anglo-French Entente, 36, 147; presses for declaration of war-aims, 161
Last Essays, 1, 173, 187
Lawson, H. L. W., 6
Layton, Sir Walter, 222
League of Nations, 121; Spender's belief in, 164, 166-9; U.S. and, 167; and Japanese aggression, 167-8, 177; Russia and, 177
Le Bas, Hedley, 220
Lee, Sir Kenneth, 198
Leeds Mercury, 106, 112
Leith Hill, 145
Le Sage (of *Daily Telegraph*), 13
Liberal Council, 215-17
"Liberal Imperialists," 102, 108, 146
Liberal League, 102, 108, 110
Liberal Organisation Committee, 216-17
Liberal Party, 22; returned to power, 24-5, 37; social programme of, 37, 80-1, 115-16; Spender's value to, 39, 74-6; efforts towards unity in, 90, 102 *et seq*, 146; Rosebery's position in, 102, 109-12; "headless" condition of, 105; split by Boer War, 146; second split in, 164; in Canada, Spender's assistance to, 177-8; process of disintegration in, 213 *et seq*, and Lloyd George's Fund, 213-15; and annexation of Sudan, 231-2
Lichnowsky, Prince, 148
Life, Journalism and Politics, 3, 15, 52, 88, 121, 150, 173, 179-80; extracts from, 101, 148
Life of Campbell-Bannerman, 1, 173-4, 176
Life of Lord Cowdray, 173, 175-6, 207
Life of Lord Oxford, The, 144*n.*, 173-5, 177
Life of Sir Robert Hudson, 173, 175-6
Lindsay, Sir Robert, 205
Liverpool Daily Post, 33
Lloyd, Lord, 205
London County Territorial Association, 117, 156
Lords, House of, reform of, 37, 91
Loreburn, Lord, 82, 87; and staff talks with France, 157
Lothian, Lord, 223
Low, Sidney, 149*n.*
Lugard, Captain Frederick, 26
Lugard, Lady, 145

M

MacDonald, Ramsay, 156, 166; offers Spender knighthood, 46; and Armament Commission, 198, 200
McKenna, Ernest, 57
McKenna, Reginald, Spender's relations with, 31, 57, 85, 157, 160; Big Navy programme of, 82, 117-19, 153; succeeded by Churchill, 130, 132-3
Maclean, Sir Donald, 28, 57
McMahon, Sir Henry, 192
Maffey, Sir John, 206
Malcolm, Sir Ian, 140
Mallet, Sir Charles, 6-8, 10
Manchester Guardian, 38, 208
Marchand, Captain, 36, 147
Marden, Kent, 54; Spender reads lessons at, 69, 71-2

Massingham, H. W., 105
Matrimonial Causes Bill, 190
Maurice, Major-General Sir Frederick, 38*n.*, 164
Maxse, L. J., 142
Maxwell, General Sir John, 191
Melchett, Lord, 28; Spender's letter to, 50–1
Men and Things, 61, 173, 186, 202
Mensdorff, Count, 148
Meredith, George, 24*n.*
Meston, Lord, 216–17
Metternich, Count, 150, 156; sends books to Spender, 145; Haldane's dinner to, 148
Milner, Alfred, 5, 22; and Mission to Egypt, 79, 190, 193–4, 197; High Commissioner of South Africa, 146
Milner Mission, 49, 78–9, 187, 190–7; boycott of, 193–4; Report of, 195–7; negative result of, 206
Milner-Zaghlul Agreement, 197
Modern Journal, A, 172
Mond, Sir Alfred, *See* Melchett, Lord
Monte Carlo, 56
Moore, George, 40*n.*
Morgan, Dr. Campbell, 68; on *The Public Life*, 179
Morison, Sir Theodore, 203
Morley, John (Lord), 117, 156, 202–3; advice of, 12–13; on Spender's first book, 19–20; editor of *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22; tribute from, 35; Spender's friendship with, 37, 85, 88–93; resigns from Cabinet, 37, 91; objects to posts for journalists, 49, 89; and 1905 Ministry, 74; Irish doctrine of, 86; letter of, to *Westminster*, 89–90; letters of, to Spender, 90–2; *Recollections* of, 92; Rosebery on, 108; Esher on, 121–2; and Campbell-Bannerman's *Life*, 173; on Sudan, 231–2
Morning Post, 39, 60
Morocco, French in, 147, 156
Munich agreement, 169–71, 187, 225
Munro, H. A. J., 6
Murray, Sir Gilbert, 58; letter to, 169; and Liberal Council, 215
Mustapha Kemel, 181, 205

N

Nakamura, J., 186
National Health Insurance, 81
National Liberal Federation, 87; Spender President of, 213–14
National Reform Union, 107
Nawanagar, 203–4
Nazareth, 55, 208
Nettleship, R. L., 5
Nevinson, H. W., 208
New Fiction, The, 172
New Lamps and Ancient Lights, 173, 186
Newnes, Sir Frank, 28
Newnes, Sir George, 139; founds *Westminster Gazette*, 23; gives editorship to Spender, 27–8
News Chronicle, 222–3
Newspapers and their Millionaires, 140
New York, 210–11
New York Evening Post, 208
Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 16
Northcliffe, Lord, 56, 208; leaders on, 43; relations between Spender and, 136–8, 140 *et seq.*; and Tariff Reform, 137–8; acquires *The Times*, 138–9; on Spender and the *Westminster*, 140–1; and seat at Peace Conference, 144
Northern Echo, 225
Nuba tribe, 207

O

Old Age Pensions, 37, 81, 172; Spender's book on, 19–20, 171–2; article on, 34; Rosebery on, 116
Omdurman, 230–1
Orange, Sir Hugh, 16–18
Ottawa Agreement, 215
Oxford, Spender at, 4–10
Oxford and Asquith, Lady, 85
Oxford and Asquith, Lord, 133, 135, 191; at Balliol, 5; Spender's friendship with, 31, 37, 82, 85–6, 140; tribute from, 35, 42, 86; overthrow of, 38, 163, 213; and Maurice debate, 38*n.*, 164; on allocation of honours, 47–8; and 1905 Ministry, 74–5; letters of, 86–8; Spender's tribute to, 87–8, 163; argument with, on *In*

Memoriam, 88; and Liberal League, 108; opposed to Chamberlain, 110; and C.B.'s Stirling speech, 113; lethargy of, 121; biography of, 173-5; invites Spender to Commission, 187; appeals to Spender to become President of N.L.F., 213; resigns Leadership of Liberal Party, 214
Oxford Mail, 225

P

Page, T. E., 62, 65
Page, Walter Hines, 148, 210
Palestine, 56, 208
Pall Mall Gazette, 21-23; Spender's contributions to, 9, 11, 20; Spender joins staff of, 20
Paris, British Consulate brought back to, 76, 161-2
Parted Lives, 1
"Passionate Pilgrims, The," 9-10
Pater, Walter, 9*n*., 10
Paul, Herbert, 27
Pawson, A. G., 207
Peace Conference, 164-5
Pearson, Arthur, 138-9
Pearson, Clive, 222-4
Pember, Dr. F. W., 41
Pentland, Lord, 173
Phillipps, Vivian, 62, 217, 228
Phillips, J. S. R., 149*n*.
Plender, Lord, 63
Plumer, General, 85
Potsdam, 151
Primrose, Neil, 116
Public Life, The, 68, 83, 173, 176, 178-9

Q

Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, 9*n*.

R

Ranjitsinghi, Prince, 58, 203-4
Rawlinson, Mary, *See* Spender, Mary
Rea, Lord, 62
Reform Club, 62; dinners to Spender at, 62-5; volumes for Library of, 145
Rendel, Lord, 31*n*.
Repington, Colonel, 139-40, 149, 208
Rhayader, Lord, 215
Rhodes, Cecil, 145
Richmond, Sir William, 18*n*.
Roberts, Lord, 156
Robertson, Sir William, 161, 163
Robinson, Crabb, 1
Rodd, Sir Rennell, 79, 191, 196; Spender on, 191
Roosevelt, Franklin, 177
Roos-Keppel, Sir George, 201
Root, Elihu, 209
Rosebery, Lord, 24*n*., 25-6, 88, 175; tributes from, 34, 64, 100, 230; on critics, 43; Chesterfield speech of, 93, 108, 112; relations of, with Spender, 98, *et seq*., 145; letters of, 98-101, 103-8; Derby winner of, 99-100; walks with Spender, 100, 147; Spender's tribute to, 101-2; a cause of Party disunity, 102 *et seq*.; resigns Party leadership of, 102-3; provocative speeches of, 105, 108; dissension between Campbell-Bannerman and, 107-14; Spender's appeal to, 109-12; Bodmin speech of, 112-14; on France and Germany, 115, 147; Northcliffe's offer to, 138; on *Life, Journalism and Politics*, 180
Rousseau, J. J., 235
Royde-Smith, Naomi, 41
Runciman, Lord, 63; letter to, 96-8
Rushdi Pasha, 192-3
Ruskin, John, 6
Russell, G. W. E., 107
Russell, Lord, of Liverpool, 33
Russia, and Anglo-Japanese Treaty, 69; Churchill's policy towards, 85; desires opening of Straits, 153-4; French alliance with, 157; and Germany, 158; and League, 177

S

Salisbury, Lord, 36, 89, 129
Salter, Arthur, 63
Samuel, Lord, 62, 64
Saturday Westminster, 41, 58
Saunders, William, 2, 11-12, 19; offers job to Spender, 11-12, 14; Member for Hull, 14

Schiemann, Professor, 158
"Scrutator," 226-7
Sennar Dam, 207
Servia, 155
Sharp, Clifford, 220
Shaw, Flora, 145
Shaw, George Bernard, letter from, 34
Short History of Our Times, A, 173, 186
Siam, 147
Sidebotham, Herbert, 226
Sidney Street, 84
Sidgwick, Alfred, 41
Simon, Lord, 63, 65, 183-4
Sinclair, Sir Archibald, 83, 218; attacks N. Chamberlain, 170-1
Slade, Admiral, 131
Smith, A. L., 5
Smith, F. E., 83
Smith, George, 21-2
Smith, W. R., 4
Snowden, Viscountess, 83
Solomon, Sir R., 87
South Africa, 145-6; settlement of, 86-7; letters from Gladstone in, 93
Spencer, Lord, 25, 109-11, 175
Spender, Col. Wilfrid, *2n.*
Spender, Dr. 1; letter to, 67
Spender, Edward, 2
Spender, Harold, 2, 16
Spender, Hugh, 2
Spender, J. A., parentage of, 1-2; childhood of, 2, 42; as a cyclist, 2, 57; education of, 2-10; at Balliol, 4-10; his views on poetry, 6, 59-60, 187; fails to get First in Greats, 6-7, 58; and choice of profession, 8, 10-13; political inclinations of, 9; in Hull, 12, 14-19; early vicissitudes, 12-14; illness of, 14, 16; first editorship of, 14-19; engagement of, 18-19; first book of, 19-20, 171-2; on staff of *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20-3; marriage, 20-1; and *Westminster Gazette*, 23-4, 26 *et seq.*; leaders of, 26, 30, 33-6, 39-41, 102-3, 230 *et seq.*; political connections of, 27, 31; becomes editor, 27-8; tributes to, 31-6, 42, 52, 63-5, 100; at outbreak of war (1914), 38, 91, 159; qualities of, as controversialist, 38-9; services of, to Liberalism, 39, 42, 74-6; book reviews of, 41, 80; integrity and judgement of, 43-6, 66; moderation of, 43-4; sense of responsibility of, 48-9; Charter President of Institute of Journalists, 44, 66; declines honours, 46-8; accepts Companionship of Honour, 47, 63, 65; on a journalist's difficulties, 48-9, 97; work of, on missions and Commissions, 49, 78-9, 165, 170, 187 *et seq.*; relations of, with proprietors, 50-1; a great man, 52-3; married life of, 53-4; homes of, 53-4; his love of gardens, 54-6; his love of travel, 56-7, 201 *et seq.*; as cricketer, 57; collaborates with Sir E. Grey, 57, 94; as a scholar, 58-9; watercolours of, 60-2; Reform Club dinners to, 62-5; as a speaker, 64, 151, 211; portrait of, 64-5; Deputy-Lieutenant of County of London, 65; member of Athenæum, 65-6; visits Germany, 66, 149-52; his attitude to religion, 66 *et seq.*; confession of faith, of, 68-71; reads lessons, 69-72; last days of, 73, 225-9; "behind the scenes" achievements of, 76-7; secures reorganisation of medical service, 76, 161-3; friendly relations of, with political chiefs, 77 *et seq.*, 98 *et seq.*, 116 *et seq.*, 148; on railway Committee, 81; chief friends of, 85, 94; strives for Liberal unity, 90, 102 *et seq.*; asked to stand for Parliament, 93-4; supports Big Navy programme, 82, 95-6, 117-19, 153, 155-7; elegiacs of, 99; walks of with Rosebery, 100, 147; appeals to Rosebery, 109-12; his relations with Esher, 117; in submarine, 123; attempts to persuade Fisher, 135; last meeting with Fisher, 135-6; his relations with Northcliffe, 136-8, 140 *et seq.*; and editorship of *The Times*, 138-40; Northcliffe suggests rewards for, 140; his knowledge of foreign politics, 144 *et seq.*; his role of "smoother", 147, 149; angers Kaiser, 149, 152; meets Kaiser, 151-2; his discussions with Isvolsky, 153-4;

importance attached to, by Central Powers, 158-9; and danger of invasion, 159-60; war-time activities of, 160-4; on Peace Conference, 164-5; belief of, in League of Nations, 164, 166-9; altered position of, 165-6, 219; his belief in need for power behind sanctions, 166-9, 216, 218; attitude of, towards Munich, 169-71, 187, 216-18, 225; books of, 171 *et seq.*; as biographer, 173-7; helps Liberal Party in Canada, 177-8; autobiography of, 179-80; on Divorce Commission, 187-90; in Egypt, 191, 193-7, 205-6; accident to, 196; his part in Arms Commission, 198-200, 218; on journalistic visit to India, 201-2; in India, 202-4; in Turkey, 204-5; in Sudan, 206-7; in United States, 208-12; resignation of, 209, 219-20; holds Page Fellowship, 210; American speeches of, 211; summarises his American impressions, 212; in West Indies, 212; becomes President of National Liberal Federation, 213-14; President of Liberal Council, 215-17; his association with *News* and *News Chronicle*, 220-4; writes for Westminster Press papers, 224-7; writes for *Sunday Times*, 226-7, 233-6; writes broadcasts, 227
Spender, Lily, 1
Spender, Mary, 18, 68, 73, 89, 145, 227-9; admired by Stevenson, 18*n.*; engagement of, 19; marriage of, 20-1, 53-4; founds hospitals, 21, 54, 161; Spender's letters to, 62-4, 83, 89, 144, 150-1, 214, 215; Crewe's tribute to, 63; Fisher and, 123, 125, 134; helps reorganise hospital service, 161; visits Egypt, 191; visits India, 202-3; visits America, 210; in West Indies, 212
Spender, Stephen, 59
Spring-Rice, Sir Cecil, 79
Stamfordham, Lord, 202
State and Pensions in Old Age, The, 19-20, 171-2
Stead, William Thomas, 43; on *Pall Mall*, 13, 22; member of mission to Germany, 149*n.*; suggests visit by journalists to India, 201-2
Steed, Wickham, 208
Stevenson, Robert Louis, 18-19
Strachan-Davidson, Master of Balliol, 5
Strachey, St. Loe, 143
Stresemann, Dr., 167
Sudan, 194, 206-7; annexation of, 230; article on, 231-2
Suez Canal, defence of, 194, 196
Sumner, Lord, 6
Sunday Times, Spender writes for, 222, 226-7; article in, 233-6
Supply, Ministry of, 200
Swinnerton, Frank, 62

T

Tagore, Rabindranath, 203-4
Tankerton, hospital at, 21, 54, 161
Tennant, Mrs. H. J., 188
Territorials, Haldane on, 94; Esher and, 117; Spender supports, 156
These Times, 173, 177-8, 218
Thomas, Brig.-General Sir Owen, 191
Thompson, Henry Yates, 22-3
Times, The, 155, 208, 227; sale of, 138-9; battle between *Westminster* and, 141-4; Spender's letters to, 168, 170, 217
Tomalin, P. R. S., 23
Tonypandy, 84
Toynbee, Arnold, 5, 9
Toynbee Hall, founding of, 9; Spender at, 13, 18-19, 171
Transvaal, 145; settlement of, 86-7
Trevelyan, Dr. G. M., 65, 186
Treves, Sir Frederick, 188
Tribune, The, 29, 138
Truth, 103
Tunbridge Wells, 228
Turkey, 129-30, 154; under Mustapha Kemel, 181, 205; suzerain of Egypt, 192; Spender visits, 204-5
Tutankhamen, tomb of, 206
Tweedmouth, Lord, 27, 75, 153
Tweedsmuir, Lord, *see* Buchan, John
Twenty-Five Years (Grey), 57, 94, 145, 182

U

United States, lack of flowers in, 55; Bryce in, 93, 208; Fisher in, 127-8; enters war, 164; and disarmament, 166-7; Spender's visits to, 181, 201, 208-12

V

Voules, Stirling C., 4

W

Walton, Lawson, 87
War Office Reform Committee, 117, 222
Washington, Naval Disarmament Conference at, 32, 38, 166-7, 208-9, 219
Watson, Sir Alfred, 39
Wells, H. G., 62-3, 208
Western Morning News, 2, 11
West Indies, 56, 201, 212
Westminster Gazette, 1, 129; starting of, 23-4; Spender's association with, 24, 26 *et seq.*; title of, 24 *et seq.*; a commercial failure, 28, 30, 44; transferred to syndicate, 28-9, 139, 175; becomes a daily, 30, 209, 219-20; leaders in, 30, 33-6, 39-41, 94, 102-3, 230-2; the voice of Liberalism, 31, 39, 86; and Tariff Reform, 36, 43; as a Ministerial organ, 37; cartoons in, 106; Northcliffe offers to help, 137; Northcliffe on, 140-1; battle between *The Times* and, 141-4; Bethman-Hollweg's message to, 159; attitude of, towards conscription, 161; gives report of speech at Peace Conference, 165; articles reprinted from, 172; Spender resigns from, 209, 219-20; amalgamates with *Daily News*, 220-1
Westminster Newsletter, 217-18
Westminster Press Ltd., 223-6
Weymouth, Lord, 5*n.*
White, William Allen, 211
Wilde, Oscar, 26
Wilhelm II, Kaiser, 31, 37; *Telegraph* interview with, 45, 153; angered by Spender's article, 149; Spender's interview with, 151-2; in London, 156
Williams, Lord Justice Vaughan, 145
Wilson, Sir Arthur, 130-1, 135, 160
Wilson, Woodrow, 179, 209; Fourteen Points speech of, 120-1; Fisher on, 128; Spender meets, 164
Windsor, Duke of, 129
Wingate, Sir Reginald, 192
Wolseley, Lord, 77
Worsley, Herbert, 217; Spender's letters to, 7*n.*, 14, 73, 82, 227, 228-9; at Reform Club, 62

Z

Zaghlul Pasha, 192-3, 196-7
Zeppelin raids, 141, 161
Ziwar Pasha, 195